2. A QUARTER-CENTURY OF UNRESOLVED PROBLEMS

Completion of a railroad line strangling the South Manchurian Railway

What were the cumulative factors which, over a quarter-century, gave rise to the Manchurian Incident? According to the Lytton Commission's report, "The international politics of Manchuria for a quarter of a century have been largely railway politics."[1] As already stated, these political conflicts, which arose soon after the Russo-Japanese War, gave rise to numerous disputes (the great majority of which were never resolved), and ultimately culminated in the Manchurian Incident.

By waging the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese rescued Manchuria from the Russians. They then constructed a railroad in that wasteland, established industries, built an underpinning for prosperity, and with the aid of the Guandong Army, maintained public order. Consequently, the calamities of Chinese domestic strife did not affect Manchuria, which thrived as a separate, peaceful world. Each year a million Han Chinese, desperate to escape the ravages of war in China, poured into Manchuria. The population of Manchuria, 18 million at the time of the 1911 Revolution, had swelled to 30 million by 1931.

Thanks to Japanese economic development efforts, Manchurian trade increased. In 1927, 20 years after the customs authority in Dalian opened, there was evidence of remarkable growth: the trade volume for China proper was 2.64 times, and that for Manchuria, 6.55 times the 1907 figure. The authors of the Lytton Report had no choice but to acknowledge that Manchuria's growth was the result of Japanese economic activity.

When Zhang Zuolin held sway over Manchuria, he realized how important and how profitable the railroads were, and decided to exploit Manchurian economic benefits by constructing his own railroad.

However, railroad construction using Japanese capital and technology was always accompanied by breaches of contract and betrayals of trust, including defaults on construction expenses and loan repayments. In the end, Zhang established the Three Provinces Transportation Committee (renamed Northeastern Transportation Committee by Zhang Xueliang in September 1928), and set about strangling the South Manchuria Railway by constructing his own railroads. Over two generations, Zhang Zuolin, and then his son, Zhang Xueliang, proceeded to build two lines parallel to the South Manchuria Railway, thus committing a treaty violation. The parallel railroads were completed in 1929. As a result, the South Manchuria Railway fell into decline and then ruin. Obviously, the Japanese could not stand by and watch as this strangulation progressed.

Incidentally, the parallel-line problem arose long before the Russo-Japanese War, when Russia leased Port Arthur and Dalian, and built the southern branch of the Chinese Eastern Railway. The Russians extracted a promise from the Chinese, by way of Article 3 of an agreement appended to the Li-Lobanov Treaty (concluded between Russia and China in May 1898), not to construct any

[1] Commission of Enquiry, Earl of Lytton, *op. cit.*, 42.

railroad that would compete with the Chinese Eastern Railway. When the Russo-Japanese War ended, Japan requested the same terms, and to make them clear and binding, included Article 3 in protocols attached to the Treaty of Manchuria (December 1905):

> The Chinese Government engage, for the purpose of protecting the interest of the South Manchurian Railway, not to construct, prior to the recovery by them of the said railway, any main line in the neighborhood of and parallel to that railway, or any branch line which might be prejudicial to the interest of the above-mentioned railway.[2]

Subsequently, frequently occurring problems involving parallel railroad lines had a negative effect on Japan-China relations for quite some time. The first one arose in 1907, when the Chinese came up with a plan to construct a railroad extending from Xinmintun to Fakumen, with capital provided by British firm Pauling and Company. This project was met with vehement objections from the Japanese, who cited it as a treaty violation.[3] This dispute was finally settled on September 4, 1909, with a treaty that contained the following provision:

> Art. 2 – The Government of China engages that in the event of its undertaking to construct a railway between Hsinmintun and Fakumen, it shall arrange previously with the Government of Japan.[4]

Violation of commercial-lease rights

I have already discussed the violation of Japanese land- and commercial-lease rights in southern Manchuria, such rights having been established by the Sino-Japanese Treaty of 1915.[5] Japanese land-lease and commercial-lease rights in southern Manchuria and eastern Inner Mongolia were based on that same treaty, signed on May 25, 1915, which settled the Twenty-One Demands problem, and therefore should have become established as legitimate rights.

Article 2 of the treaty reads as follows:

> Article 2. Japanese subjects in South Manchuria may, by negotiation, lease land necessary for erecting suitable buildings for trade and manufacture or for prosecuting agricultural enterprises.[6]

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[2] Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of International Law, "Summary of alleged Secret Protocols to Sino-Japanese Treaty of December 22, 1905" in *Manchuria, Treaties and Agreements* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), 83.

[3] See Chapter 4.1.

[4] Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *op. cit.*, "Agreement concerning mines and railways in Manchuria, 129.

[5] See Chapter 5.1.

[6] Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *op. cit.*, "Treaty and exchanges of notes respecting South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia*,"* 156.

Further clarification can be found in the Exchange of Notes relating to said article, which states that "the term 'lease by negotiation' contained in Article 2 of the Treaty respecting South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia signed this day shall be understood to imply a long-term lease of not more than thirty years and also the possibility of its unconditional renewal."[7] "Unconditional renewal" can be construed as the guarantee of the right to lease the land in perpetuity (in effect, to purchase and own the land in question).

However, as the Lytton Report states, "The Chinese interpreted the desire of the Japanese to obtain lands in Manchuria, whether by lease, purchase, or mortgage, as evidence of a Japanese national policy to 'buy Manchuria.' Their authorities therefore very generally attempted to obstruct efforts of the Japanese to this end, and became increasingly active in the three or four years preceding September 1931, a period during which the Chinese 'Rights-Recovery Movement' was at its height."[8]

Treaties relating to land leases normally require separate agreements for their implementation. But the Chinese had not yet fulfilled their obligations under the treaty 15 years after it was signed (on the pretext that no detailed agreement including all the specifics had yet been concluded), and they even exerted undue pressure on Japanese residents and business owners.

For instance, on June 24, 1915, one month after the signing of the Sino-Japanese Treaty, the Chinese issued a presidential decree promulgating a special criminal law called the Ordinance for the Punishment of Traitors, which stated that anyone who leased land to a Japanese would be executed for treason.

On the one hand, China made public promises relating to land and commercial leases and the like, through a treaty with Japan. Yet, on the other hand, China, as a contracting party, issued prohibitions that invalidated and undermined that very treaty. Such behavior does not even remotely resemble that of a modern, civilized nation. But it was the time-honored way in which China sowed the seeds of international conflict with colossal disregard for the law and dishonesty.

In December of 1916, the year after the Sino-Japanese Treaty was signed, the Fengtian authorities issued a ministerial ordinance stating that "land rights (land certificates) used as collateral or sold as collateral are henceforth invalid." In December of the following year another ministerial ordinance emerged, declaring that "persons who have used land certificates as collateral, or who have sold land under the pretext of collateral, will be treated as traitors and criminals." These two ordinances were enforced and remained in effect until the Manchurian Incident came about in 1931.

In July 1929 the Fengtian provincial government enacted the Provisional Ordinance Prohibiting the Theft and Sale of Land. It proceeded to convey secret orders to local officials within its jurisdiction, to execute or impose heavy fines on persons who mortgaged or leased land to foreign

[7] Carnegie, *op. cit.*, 163.

[8] Commission of Enquiry, Earl of Lytton, *op. cit.*, 54.

nationals. This law was applied retroactively. The 1915 Sino-Japanese Treaty had been reduced to empty words; it was now completely impossible for Japanese to exercise their commercial leasing rights in southern Manchuria.

There is no doubt that China's treacherous national policy, or more accurately, double-dealing diplomacy, whereby the Chinese openly concluded international treaties while secretly obstructing them, was the main cause of the commercial-lease dispute between the two nations.

China's sweeping anti-Japanese educational policy

As the GMD became better organized and its activities more robust, so did the anti-Japanese movement. Prior to the Manchurian Incident, the anti-Japanese movement had become a joint activity of the national government and private sector, implemented in accordance with the government's revolutionary diplomacy. Now almost an absolute national policy, anti-Japanese sentiment had deeply permeated all sectors of the population and all levels of society.

The Nationalist government in Nanjing was primarily responsible for enacting laws and issuing instructions encouraging or enforcing anti-Japanese sentiment. By requiring the inclusion of anti-Japanese education programs in schools and anti-Japanese propaganda in the military, and requiring the singing of both civilian and military anti-Japanese songs, it planted staunch anti-Japanese sentiment in the minds of the Chinese people. Needless to say, there was no place in anti-Japanese education for facts that revealed China's own guilt or faults, which were distorted or concealed. Emphasis was placed on the enumeration of grossly exaggerated Japanese acts of "oppression," which antagonized ignorant soldiers and confused innocent children.

Since the children who were subjected to anti-Japanese education would, after a few years, or even a dozen years, become China's leaders, the realization of the harm these programs could inflict was terrifying.

Anti-Japanese accounts were scattered throughout textbooks covering a wide range of subjects, including geography, history, Chinese language, singing, civics, social studies, and common sense. The central theme in each account was the overthrow of Japanese imperialism. Specific anti-Japanese topics included the following:

(1) Abolition of unequal treaties
(2) Injustice of the Treaty of Maguan (Shimonoseki), which ended the First Sino-Japanese War
(3) Losses inflicted on China by the Boxer Protocol
(4) Censure of 1915 negotiations between Japan and China over the Twenty-One Demands
(5) Assertion that the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan and Korea are Chinese territory
(6) Demand for the return of the Guandong Leased Territory
(7) Advocacy of commemorating May 3, 9, and 30 as days of national humiliation
(8) Opposition to Japanese inroads into Manchuria and Mongolia
(9) Withdrawal of consular jurisdiction
(10) Strong support for tariff autonomy
(11) Opposition to the granting of the right of navigation in inland rivers

(12) Chinese losses caused by Japanese enterprises (railroads, mining, and the spinning industry)
(13) Rejection of Japanese currency
(14) Advocacy of the use of Chinese currency.

Anti-Japanese teaching materials maintained that "the Japanese people are aggressive by nature,"[9] and that "to the south of Kyushu lie the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, and the Penghu Islands. Several decades ago, all of these belonged to China. The Korean peninsula, located northwest of Kyushu, was also stolen from our country."[10] Since Chinese students were taught that the Japanese are born aggressors, and that not only the Ryukyu Islands, but also Korea, are Chinese territory, it is only natural that they would come to harbor fierce anti-Japanese views.

On an everyday basis, anti-Japanese activists dispersed anti-Japanese handbills, spread rumors, intimidated, assaulted, and threatened Japanese who were simply walking down the street, going to and from school, or shopping. They disrupted train service, and using both tangible and intangible means, disrupted every aspect of the lives of Japanese residents.

300 unresolved problems between Japan and China

As the anti-Japanese movement gained momentum, incident after incident arose — too many to enumerate. Typical were anti-Japanese acts committed by Chinese troops, interference with railway operation, and clashes between Japanese and Chinese officials prior to the Manchurian Incident. According to a survey conducted by the Guandong Army's Operation Section, the number of incidents having some connection to Manchuria or Mongolia occurring during the period from January 1927 to December 1930 are shown below.[11]

Year	Number of incidents
1927	31
1928	37
1929	77
1930	95
TOTAL	240

Additionally, more than 300 similar problems, including attacks on and persecution of Korean residents in Manchuria were still unresolved when the Manchurian Incident broke out.

The situation in Manchuria had become so toxic and precarious that the very tiniest of sparks might easily have set off a huge explosion. It was amid such an atmosphere in the early summer of 1931 when the Wanbaoshan Incident, which involved a dispute between Japanese and Chinese authorities over the persecution of Korean farmers, erupted. The incident itself did not stand out

[9] *Xin zhonghua lishi keben gaojiyong di si ce* (New advanced Chinese history textbook: vol. 4).

[10] *Gaoji dili keben di si ce* (New advanced Chinese history textbook, vol. 4).

[11] *Gendaishi shiryō 11* (Documents pertaining to modern history) (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1965).

in the context of the many events of the past few years. However, exaggerated news reports caused violent riots in Korea, which in turn gave rise to even more vehement anti-Japanese activity in China. None of these problems were resolved prior to the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident.

Murder of Captain Nakamura necessitates action

Not long before the Manchurian Incident, Army Capt. Nakamura Shintarō, a member of the Operations Section, was killed by Chinese troops. About his murder, the Lytton Report states, "The Nakamura case, more than any other single incident, greatly aggravated the resentment of the Japanese and their agitation in favour of forceful means to effect a solution of outstanding Sino-Japanese difficulties in regard to Manchuria."[12]

On June 9, 1931 Capt. Nakamura, accompanied by Reserve Cavalry Sgt. Isugi Nobutarō, as well as a White Russian and a Mongolian, set out on a southward journey, a strategic military geographic survey. His party boarded the southbound Chinese Eastern Railway at Irkut Station, traveled to Xing'anling, and then continued southward. On June 26, east of Suolun, the men were captured by Chinese troops from the 3rd Regiment of the Reclamation Army, commanded by Guan Yuheng. On June 27 Capt. Nakamura's party was murdered by Guan and his men. Their bodies were burned in an attempt to destroy evidence.

On July 17 Uematsu Kikuko, Guan Yuheng's Japanese mistress, relayed information about the murder to the Japanese consul at Qiqihar. The Guandong Army had opened an investigation in the beginning of July when Capt. Nakamura failed to arrive at his destination as scheduled. Toward the end of July its representatives got to the heart of the matter after having interviewed Uematsu. The Guandong Army immediately entered into negotiations with Chinese officials in Fengtian, and attempted to set an investigation in motion, but the central government refused to grant its approval.[13] The negotiations were transferred from the military to diplomatic officials, with whom negotiations commenced on August 17. The Chinese promised to conduct an investigation of the murder, but proceeded to drag their feet. They failed to act in good faith, and to make matters worse, also oversaw the publication of newspaper coverage claiming that accusations that Capt. Nakamura had been murdered were baseless. Foreign Minister Wang Zhengting also insisted that there had been no such incident. He added that since Manchuria was full of Japanese troublemakers, one of them had probably fabricated the story of the murder. Guandong Army officials reacted to such behavior by becoming even more resolute in their stance. Newspapers in Japan excoriated the Chinese for their unjust behavior, and their counterparts in Dalian castigated the Japanese government for its inaction. In late August 1931 Manchuria was "practically in a state of war."[14] The situation was extremely tense, and as the proverb tells us, "coming events cast their shadows before them."[15] The final resolution was near.

[12] Commission of Enquiry, Earl of Lytton, *op. cit.*, 65.

[13] Katakura Tadashi, *Kaisō no Manshūkoku* (Reminiscences of Manzhouguo) (Tokyo: Keizaiōraisha, 1978).

[14] Usui Katsumi, *Manshū jihen* (Manchurian Incident) (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1974).

[15] Katakura, *op. cit.*

By the time Northeast Army Chief of Staff Rong Zhen awakened to the importance of the situation, and admitted that Capt. Nakamura had indeed been murdered, it was 3:00 p.m. on September 18. As the Chinese had acknowledged that a crime had been committed, arrangements were made for the negotiations to proceed to the next level. But by then, it was too late. That night saw the unfolding of the Liutiaogou Incident.

3. POST-INCIDENT DEVELOPMENTS

The Stimson Doctrine

Soon after the Liutiaogou Incident, China tendered a protest to the League of Nations. A few days later Japan issued its own declaration concerning the incident, which stated that Japan had no territorial ambitions whatsoever in Manchuria, and that Japan's only desire was for Japanese citizens to be able to reside and do business in Manchuria, in peace, in accordance with their legitimate rights. The pronouncement about Japan's having no territorial designs on Manchuria was sincere. Consider the fact that Japan could certainly have used its military might to annex Manchuria, had it wished to. However, it did not, instead establishing an independent state.

On September 30, 1931 the Council of the League of Nations issued a resolution that called for negotiation between Japan and China concerning the following:

1. Mutual declaration of non-aggressive policy or action in Manchuria.
2. Mutual engagements to suppress hostile agitation.
3. Reaffirmation by Japan as to the territorial integrity of China, including Manchuria.
4. Japanese subjects in Manchuria to be sufficiently protected by the Chinese when carrying on their peaceful and legitimate proceedings.
5. Arrangements to be reached between Japan and China for the prevention of ruinous railway competition and for the carrying into effect of existing railway agreements.[1]

Meanwhile, the independence movement in Manchuria was gaining momentum. In November all three eastern provinces severed ties with the Nanjing government.

In December the Japanese military began advancing into Jinzhou, the site of Zhang Xueliang's new government, and a strategic base for armed anti-Japanese activity. On January 3, 1932 they achieved a bloodless occupation of Jinzhou, whereupon Zhang's government vanished into thin air. US Secretary of State Henry Stimson's reaction was to send a note addressed to both Japan and China, dated January 7. An excerpt follows.

> The American Government deems it to be its duty to notify both the Government of the Chinese Republic and the Imperial Japanese Government that it cannot admit the legality of any situation *de facto* nor does it intend to recognize any treaty or agreement entered into between those governments, or agents thereof, which may impair the treaty rights of the United States or its citizens in China, including those which relate to the sovereignty, the independence, or the territorial and administrative integrity of the Republic of China, or to the international policy relative to China, commonly known as the open door policy, and that it does not intend to recognize any situation, treaty or

[1] US Office of the Historian, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, Japan, 1931–1941, Volume I*, Document No. 23, Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State (Castle) of a Conversation with the Japanese Ambassador (Debuchi), October 14, 1931; https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1931-41v01/d23 (retrieved 03/2025).

> agreement which may be brought about by means contrary to the covenants and obligations of the Pact of Paris of August 27, 1928."[2]

This is the notorious Stimson Doctrine. Stimson was building on the "non-recognition" position taken by Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan in 1915, when Japan issued the Twenty-One Demands to China.

In its response to Stimson dated January 16, 1932, the Japanese government stated that "any replacement which has occurred in the personnel of the administration of Manchuria has been the necessary act of the local population." It went on to say that during the Manchurian Incident, the majority of the Chinese officials in Manchuria and Mongolia took flight or resigned, thus destroying the government's political functions. With a healthy dose of sarcasm, the drafters of the response added, "The Japanese Government cannot think that the Chinese people, unlike all others, are destitute of the power of self-determination and of organizing themselves in order to secure civilized conditions when deserted by the existing officials."[3]

I have already alluded to the fact that American historian Charles Tansill pronounced Stimson's non-recognition doctrine a "hand grenade that shattered all hope of peaceful relations between Japan and the United States." And indeed, because of the Manchurian Incident, the relationship between Japan and the US did steadily worsen.

The birth of Manzhouguo

January 28, 1932 marked the outbreak of the 1st Shanghai Incident. Meanwhile, in Manchuria, the nation-building process was steadily moving forward. On March 1 the government of Manzhouguo (the State of Manchuria) announced the launching of its administration, and on March 9, Puyi was installed as head of state (Emperor Xuantong).

During this time the League of Nations selected a Commission of Enquiry, which was assigned to conduct an onsite evaluation of the Manchurian Incident. The commission was headed by Lord Victor Bulwer-Lytton, Earl of Lytton; it subsequently became known as the Lytton Commission. The other four members were Count Luigi Aldrovandi Marescotti of Italy, Gen. Henri Claude of France, Maj.-Gen. Frank Ross McCoy of the US, and Dr. Heinrich Schnee of Germany. The commission members departed from Europe in early February 1932, and visited Japan, China proper, and Manchuria. At each destination they met with officials, as well as persons having some connection with the incident. The commission then prepared a report that enumerated its conclusions, which was made public on October 2 (the Lytton Report).

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[2] US Office of the Historian, *Foreign relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1932, The Far East*, Volume III, Telegram: the Secretary of State to the Consul General at Nanking (Peck), January 7, 1932; https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1932v03/d10 (retrieved 04/2025).

[3] US Office of the Historian, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, Japan, 1931–1941, Volume I, Document No. 58, Telegram from the Ambassador in Japan (Forbes) to the Secretary of State the Japanese Ambassador January 16, 1932; https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1931-41v01/d58 (retrieved 04/2025).

The establishment of Manzhouguo took place during the course of the Lytton Commission's evaluation. On September 15 Japan and Manzhouguo concluded the Japan-Manzhouguo Protocol, in which Japan recognized Manzhouguo. After stating that "Japan has recognized the fact that Manchoukuo [the spelling of the name in then-prevailing Wade-Giles romanization] in accordance with the free will of its inhabitants, has organized and established itself as an independent territory," the Protocol continues as follows:

> 1. Manchoukuo shall confirm and respect, in so far as no agreement to the contrary shall be made between Japan and Manchoukuo in the future, all rights and interests possessed by Japan or her subjects within the territory of Manchoukuo by virtue of Sino-Japanese treaties, agreements or other arrangements or Sino-Japanese contracts, private as well as public;
>
> 2. Japan and Manchoukuo, recognizing that any threat to the territory or to the peace and order of either of the High Contracting Parties constitutes at the same time a threat to the safety and existence of the other, agree to cooperate in the maintenance of their national security; it being understood that such Japanese forces as may be necessary for this purpose shall be stationed in Manchoukuo.[4]

From Japan's viewpoint, these two provisions of the Protocol had resolved the multitude of problems relating to Manchuria.

Japan withdraws from the League of Nations

The League of Nations afforded the governments of both Japan and China an opportunity to air their opinions of the Lytton Report. The Japanese government submitted its observations, a 100-page-long document, to the Leagues on November 18; it was made public on the following day. (On December 3, China presented its refutation of Japan's opinion and a speech delivered by Matsuoka Yōsuke, a diplomat who headed the Japanese delegation.)

In February 1933 the Council of the League of Nations recognized the sovereignty of China over Manchuria, on the basis of the Lytton Report, and issued a warning to Japan to withdraw its troops into the South Manchuria railway zone. The League recommended that Manchuria be administered by an international organization, and that order there kept by an international police force. When delegates were polled, there were 42 votes in favor of the report, one vote against (Japan), and one abstention (Siam). By that time Manzhouguo had been established and was flourishing. The Japanese fundamentally disagreed with the report's recommendations, and it was at this point that they bid farewell to the League of Nations.

When Matsuoka, who as head delegate, had announced Japan's withdrawal from the League, returned to Japan from Geneva, he was greeted with an unprecedented welcome. The newspapers extolled him as a "hero who, using independent diplomacy, fought valiantly for justice." Radio stations provided nationwide coverage of his arrival in Japan, as they would have the return of a

[4] US Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1932, the Far East*, Volume IV, Document 271: The Japan-"Manchoukuo" Protocol of September 15, 1932; https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1932v04/d271.

victorious general. The *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* wrote, “The minister plenipotentiary conveyed Japan’s position, our mission in the Far East, and our national convictions, to the fullest, in an unrestrained and unapologetic manner.” We can easily imagine how public opinion of the time applauded and supported the Manchurian Incident.

4. TRUTH ABOUT THE MANCHURIAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Japanese government prohibits involvement in independence movement

Historically, when Chinese rulers suffered defeat, they have fled, abandoning their nation and their compatriots. The Liutiaogou Incident was no exception. After every single official of the Northeastern government in Liaoning province had disappeared, the Liaoning Peace Preservation Committee came into being. Yuan Jinkai became the committee's chairman, and Yu Zhonghan was among those appointed to assist him. Wang Yongjiang, Yuan Jinkai, and Yu Zhonghan were the leaders of the Manchurian civil government group.

At the IMTFE (Tokyo Trials), Maj.-Gen. Katakura Tadashi, who had assisted the Guandong Army's General Staff (and was appointed staff officer in October 1931) testified that a few Japanese acted as advisors to the Liaoning Peace Preservation Committee, at the committee's request, but that otherwise there was no relationship between the Guandong Army and the committee. In fact, Foreign Minister Shidehara and War Minister Minami Jirō sent instructions on September 25 stating that "it is strictly prohibited to have any connection with the movement for promoting a new regime in Manchuria."[1]

Japanese civilian and military officials heeded the order, and avoided involvement in the independence movement. But as the trend toward an independent Manchuria became an *idée fixe* in the minds of the Chinese, Manchurians, and Mongolians, the Japanese were no longer able to ignore it.

Manchurians' thirst for independence

By the 1920s, the misgovernment and oppressive taxation imposed by Zhang Zuolin and his son Xueliang had left the Manchurian people in terrible distress. To feed their armies and enable them to engage in warfare, the two Fengtian warlords governed irresponsibly, even going so far as to issue inconvertible Fengtian currency and force Manchurians to pay their taxes several years in advance. According to the Lytton Report, at the time of the Manchurian Incident, military expenses incurred by Xueliang's government accounted for 85 percent of the total national expenditure.[2] It is not surprising that father and son earned the rancor of the Manchurian people.

Because intellectuals affiliated with Manchuria's Civil Government Group abhorred the Zhangs' despotism, they launched a campaign called *baojing anmin* (secure the borders and bring peace to the people), whose objective was to protect Manchuria from the upheaval in China proper. The campaign appealed widely to the residents of Manchuria, whose fervent hope (and also the ultimate, inevitable goal of *baojing anmin*) was independent statehood for Manchuria. Consequently, soon

[1] IMTFE, Defense Document #2048-J: telegram from War Minister Minami to Commander of Kwantung Army, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7d/NDL10281227_Court_Exh._No._3422J-_Telegram_between....pdf; also cited during direct examination of Takeda Hisashi on 10 November 1947, 32,850-51, https://archive.org/details/130.1990-2181/131.707-863/page/n95/mode/2up?q=%22riku-man+35%.

[2] Commission of Enquiry, Earl of Lytton, *op. cit.*, 31.

after the Manchurian Incident occurred, Manchurian leaders began declaring independence: Yuan Jinkai in Liaoning province on September 24, Xi Qia in Jilin province on September 26, Zhang Jinghui in the Special Administrative Region of the Eastern Provinces on September 27, Tang Yulin in Rehe province and Yu Zhishan in Dongbian on September 29, and Zhang Haipeng in Taonan on October 1.

Manchurian politicians also envision independence

So many declarations of independence would not have been forthcoming, especially within such a short period of time, had there not been momentum toward, and groundwork for, independence prior to the Manchurian Incident. Furthermore, the fact that such declarations emanated from places other than Fengtian and Jilin, namely, in regions where the Japanese military had no presence whatsoever, proves that the movement sprung up spontaneously from the Manchurian people.

On November 7 the Peace Preservation Committee in Liaoning announced that it would sever ties with the former northeastern government led by Zhang Xueliang, and with the Nanjing government. It also decided to rename Liaoning province, which became Fengtian province. The Self-Government Guidance Board was founded in Fengtian on November 10. Yu Zhonghan, a politician affiliated with the Civil Government Group, was installed as director. Yu's main political objectives with respect to Manchurian problems are shown below.

1. Build a new, independent state rooted in *baojing anmin*.
2. Sever ties with the Nationalist government in Nanjing.
3. Abolish warlord politics and oppressive taxation.
4. Eliminate the army; entrust national defense to Japan; following the principles of the Kingly Way (benevolent rule), build a paradise that has no equal.
5. Pursue autonomy gradually, giving due consideration to history, and human sensibilities and customs.[3]

In other words, the idea of breaking off from the Nanjing Nationalist government and founding a new independent nation in Manchuria came from politicians belonging to the Civil Government Group to whom the politics of the Zhang Xueliang faction was anathema. It was decidedly not an illusion dreamed up by the Japanese.

Northeast Administrative Council members all native Manchurians

As already stated, the Japanese government had on more than one occasion ordered Japanese military personnel stationed in Manchuria to refrain from participating in attempts by Manchurians to establish a new government. The aforementioned Katakura Tadashi testified at the IMTFE as follows:

[3] "Yu Zhonghan no shutsuro to sono seiken" (Yu Zhonghan's emergence from retirement and his political views) in *Gendai shi shiryō: Manshū jihen, 7* (Documents from modern history, vol. 7: Manchurian Incident) (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1964).

> In view of the policy laid down by the central authorities, the Kwantung Army on its own part placed special emphasis on the preservation of law and order. The attitude taken by the Kwantung Army with respect to the various independent movements in the various areas of Manchuria under various leaders was silent watch – was one of watchful silence, and to contact these parties after those independence movements matured.[4]

Based on the considerations outlined above, as independence movements were established in various parts of Manchuria, the Guandong Army may have been in contact with their leaders. But it is clear that the independence movement *per se* was not the product of Japanese manipulation, but a spontaneous expression of the will of the Manchurian people.

According to the testimony of attorney Okamoto Toshio at the IMTFE, in addition to regional independence movements like those described above, there was also a popular movement backing Puyi, the emperor. For instance, Luo Zhen'yu, one of Puyi's advisors, was in contact with Gen. Xi Qia of Jilin and Gen. Zhang Haipeng of Taonan. Those generals, along with Zhang Jinghui and the Mongolian royal family, were steadfast supporters of the restoration of Puyi to the imperial throne.

On February 16 of 1932, the year after the Manchurian Incident, Gens. Zhang Jinghui, Zang Shiyi, Xi Qia, Ma Zhanshan, and Tang Yulin, along with Qi Wang and Lingsheng (both Inner Mongolians), and Zhao Xinbo, founded the Northeast Administrative Council in Fengtian. The council became the basis for the new state, but as is obvious from the names I have just listed, the planners were Chinese, Manchurians, and Mongols. There were no Japanese participants.

The main objectives of a civilian government leader like Yu Zhonghan were severing ties with the Nationalist government in Nanjing and establishing a new independent state. Additionally, the fact that that the Northeast Administrative Council (established in February 1932), which served as the seed from which Manzhouguo sprang, was composed solely of Manchurians, Chinese, and Mongolians, proves that the Manchurian independence movement was the manifestation of the voluntary will of the Manchurian people. There is no justification for condemning that movement as a Japanese plot. On February 18 the committee declared independence for Manchuria, and elected Puyi sovereign by unanimous resolution. He was installed as head of Manzhouguo's head of state on March 9, whereupon the first government of Manzhouguo was organized, with Zheng Xiaoxu as prime minister.

Japan's rebuttal to the Lytton Report

On October 2, 1932 the Report of the Commission of Enquiry (commonly referred to as the Lytton Report) was made public. On November 18 the Japanese government presented a rebuttal to the League of Nations, in which it refers to the injustice of the report's view that the independence movement exploited the Manchurian Incident.

[4] IMTFE, Direct examination of Maj.-Gen. Katakura Tadashi, witness for the defense, on 21 March 1947, 18,946; https://archive.org/details/124.2038-2239/125.2065-2152/mode/2up?q=Katakura.

> Finally, the report makes the point that such a movement [the independence movement] in favour of a change of Government could not have been carried through but for the presence of the Japanese troops. But the Japanese troops were there in the exercise of their just rights. … If the independence movement took advantage of the conditions thus created, that altered in no wise the spontaneity of the movement. There are many instances in other continents where the presence of foreign forces has afforded the possibility of attaining independence, and where that independence has never been questioned.[5]

The fact is that there are numerous instances in which nations have achieved independence through the chaos of war or the might of foreign troops. They include Outer Mongolia, the nations of Southeast Asia, and Korea. Furthermore, in none of those cases was that independence rejected.

[5] IMTFE, Observations of the Japanese Government of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry https://archive.org/details/163.1836-2060/163.1405-1553/mode/2uphttps://archive.org/details/163.1836-2060/163.1405-1553/mode/2up (retrieved 04/25).

5. DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

Struggle for survival in the presence of economic blocs

In Section 2 of this chapter, I introduced background information on the Manchurian Incident and outlined its causes. Here I shall describe the international environment surrounding Japan at the time the incident broke out, referring to the memoirs of three Japanese statesmen.

Resource-poor Japan discovered that becoming a trading nation was the key to its survival. This remains as true now as it was when the Manchurian Incident occurred. However, in 1932 the world, especially the nations of Europe, was undergoing a shift from free trade to a closed economy. The UK saw the need to weather both the Great Depression that began in 1929 and a persistent recession, and to protect existing interests against economic competition from emerging capitalist nations like Germany and Japan. In 1932 the British hosted the Imperial Economic Conference in Ottawa, at which they established preferential tariffs between the UK and its possessions. Subsequently, wealthy nations, such as the US (with its Pan-American bloc), and the French bloc established economic blocs designed to take exclusive control of the markets of their colonies.

The following is an excerpt from *Political Upheavals of the Shōwa Era* by Shigemitsu Mamoru, minister to China at the time of the Manchurian Incident.

> At that time, the Japanese were acutely anxious about their own future and the future of their country. Japan is a small island nation with very little arable land and negligible mineral resources. Her population, more than 30 million during the 1st Sino-Japanese War, doubled over the next 30 years, increasing at a rate of one million *per annum.* Finding a way to support this burgeoning population was a task that shook the very foundation of Japanese national policy. Since overseas emigration was not possible, Japan developed Korea and Taiwan to the utmost extent possible. Furthermore, she was making progress toward solving this problem through her economic activity in Manchuria. Of course, overseas trade was also essential, but trade requires partners, and obstacles sometimes present themselves. The Manchurian problem became more critical to the lives of the Japanese, day by day. We must be mindful that the objective of their hard work was survival, not a higher standard of living.
>
> The League of Nations repudiated war, and sought to reduce the armaments of all nations. However, when it came to economic problems, problems on whose solution providing food, a basic requirement for the support of human life, depended, the League offered only empty words about free trade. Meanwhile, the world, or more accurately, the European nations, had in fact reverted to a closed economy.
>
> (…)
>
> Thus, in the era of extreme nationalism that followed the First World War, the policies of the Powers shifted, straying far from the principles of free trade. The fundamentals of economic freedom, which the League of Nations had embraced, were completely forgotten. Japan could no longer depend on the development of

> overseas trade through her own hard work to feed her growing population, and was eventually compelled to lower her standard of living.
>
> In connection with this problem, Japan had a particularly close relationship with China. The anti-Japanese movement severely damaged Japan's trade with China. … Japan's interests, both in China proper and in Manchuria, were destined to be trampled by Zhang Xueliang. Nor was it easy for Japan to defend those interests in the midst of a tempest of anti-Japanese sentiment. Economic banishment from China proper *and* Manchuria would place the very livelihoods of the Japanese people in jeopardy.[1]

The second statesman, politician Konoe Fumimaro, who later served as prime minister, described the causes of the Manchurian Incident in his memoirs:

> The circumstances of the Manchurian Incident notwithstanding, I am convinced that the Powers were already making preparations to isolate Japan by forming an economic blockade against her. Blocs formed by the British Empire, the United States, the Soviet Union, and others, were on the verge of capturing the lion's share of the world's purchasing power, thus putting Japan in an unenviable position. In terms of population, these three blocs (the British Empire's 450 million, the United States' 120 million, and the Soviet Union's 160 million) account for more than 700 million souls, or one-third of the world's total population. Moreover, since they include nations with the most developed cultures, their purchasing power may exceed one-third, and most likely, rise to more than half or even two-thirds. This entire amount was to be put out of Japan's reach, whether or not the Manchurian Incident occurred, and whether or not Japan withdrew from the League of Nations.
>
> (…)
>
> Just as the dark clouds of the Powers' economic blocs were about to blanket Japan, the Manchurian Incident took place, like a bolt of lightning piercing those clouds. Even if the incident had not transpired when and in the way it did, sooner or later some attempt would have been made to dispel the dark clouds and clear the way for Japan's destiny. The 2nd Sino-Japanese War, which came on the heels of the Manchurian Incident and ultimately evolved into the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, was following the same fateful trajectory.[2]

Our third statesman, Tōgo Shigenori, was appointed foreign minister at the commencement of the Greater East Asian War. At the end of the conflict, he wrote about the economic blocs that were closing in on Japan.

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[1] Shigemitsu Mamoru, *Shōwa no dōran, jōkan* (Political upheavals of the Shōwa era, vol. 1) (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1952); also, in slightly different form, in Shigemitsu, *Japan and Her Destiny: My Struggle for Peace*, tr. Oswald White (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1958).

[2] Yabe Teiji, "Konoe Fumimaro" in *Sandai saishō retsuden: jōkan* (Biographies of three prime ministers, vol. 1) (Tokyo: Jiji Tsūshinsha, 1958).

> Some believe, and some argue, that ever since the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, and especially the Manchurian Incident, Japan has been charging resolutely along a path of militaristic aggression. However, movements within Japan are not as simple as they seem. … Some assert that unlike Japan, Britain and the United States have always been the epitome of justice, and have always striven to avoid war, but this too is an inaccurate perception. In 1932, while Japan was attempting to avoid war, the British held a conference in Ottawa.[3] At that gathering it was agreed that an attempt would be made to suppress imports by establishing a tariff system that would favor trade within the empire, but impose high tariffs on nations outside it, Japan in particular. This could be construed as a defensive measure adopted in the wake of the worldwide economic depression that began in 1929, and as a means of competing with inexpensive Japanese products. However, many nations outside the empire followed suit. Japan, which relied on imports for the great majority of industrial raw materials, and exported more than 30 percent of her production, was deeply affected. Unemployment escalated, agricultural-product prices plummeted, and domestic unrest rose exponentially. Painfully aware of the need to secure raw materials and overseas markets, the Japanese turned their attention to Manchuria. From the Japanese perspective, the Ottawa Agreements and similar tariff barriers were at the root of the Manchurian Incident and other events.[4]

All three of these men were convinced that the powers' economic blocs triggered the Manchurian Incident. After World War I the powers were using exclusive economic alliances to shut out "have-not" nations, all the while trumpeting pacifism and international cooperation. The US, which had relentlessly nagged Japan to open its doors to China, now refused to open its continental borders to Japan. Under such international pressure, "have-not" Japan had no choice but to extricate itself from this paradoxical international framework and find a way to survive. Such was the international stage on which the Manchurian Incident unfolded.

Japan cornered by "circumstances"

At the IMTFE, the prosecution depicted the Manchurian Incident as the first stage of a war of aggression, a conspiracy perpetrated by Japan's military leaders. This portrayal contributed mightily to the accusation's becoming conventional wisdom in Japan. However, Justice Radhabinod Pal of India, who submitted a judgement stating that "each and every one of the accused must be found not guilty of each and every one of the charges in the indictment and should be acquitted of all those charges."[5]

Justice Pal wrote that during Japan-US negotiations held in 1941, right before the outbreak of war, "an action of legitimate self-defense was understood by the United States of America to mean 'their own decision for themselves *whether* and *when* and *where* their interests were attacked or their security, threatened.' This self-defense was understood to extend to the placing of armed

[3] The British Empire Economic Conference, often referred to as the Ottawa Conference.

[4] Tōgo Shigenori, *Jidai no ichimen* (Aspect of an era) (Tokyo: Kaizōsha, 1952).

[5] "Dissentient Judgment of Justice Pal," International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, Inc., 1999), 697; https://www.sdh-fact.com/CL02_1/65_S4.pdf.

forces in any strategic military position keeping in view 'the lightning speed of modern warfare.'"[6] He goes on to explain how the Manchurian Incident does not stray from that definition of legitimate self-defense.

> The action of Japan in Manchuria would NOT, it is certain, BE APPLAUDED BY THE WORLD. At the same time it would be difficult to condemn the same as CRIMINAL. If a territorial sovereign is required to pay the same price for external defense of territorial integrity, whether such defense is demanded of an eastern or western nation, I would not, in the facts and circumstances then prevailing in Manchuria, and in view of the international law then existing, condemn the action of Japan AS CRIMINAL.[7]

Then Justice Pal describes the international environment surrounding Japan at the time, and concludes that the Manchurian Incident was not a conspiracy, but the consequence of that environment.

> The signature of the Versailles Treaty on the 28th June, 1919, was looked upon by the other Allied Powers as crowning Japan's efforts at prosperity. Yet, as has been shown by the Surveyor of International Affairs, this proud moment proved to be, not the dawn of a golden age in which the Japanese people would be allowed to enjoy at ease the fruits of so laborious a national effort but rather a culminating point from which Japan was to descend into a valley of tribulation. The years that intervened between 1919 and 1926 brought a dramatic reversal in Japan's international position. The Soviet Government, assisted by American diplomacy, succeeded in salving for the U.S.S.R. the heritage of the former Russian Empire as a Far Eastern and Pacific Power. … In the Washington Conference, the United States co-operated with the British Empire to restore, politely but insistently, the balance of power in the Pacific and the Far East. The earthquake followed the slump as a crowning economic blow. The United States Restriction of IMMIGRATION ACT OF 1924 followed the Washington Conference as an overt political humiliation. Last of all, in the year 1926 itself, came the rise of the Kuomintang in China with Russian Communist assistance. During the first stage in this movement when the Kuomintang was making itself master of the Yangtse Basin, the brunt was borne by Great Britain; and during 1926, as well as 1925, Japan saw her trade with China increase owing to British unpopularity. Yet, on a long view, these developments in China were more ominous for Japan than they were for Great Britain. Even if all British interests in China had perished, Great Britain herself would still have survived as one of the great commercial and political Powers of the world; but Japan — first bound to the Far Eastern mainland by an unalterable accident of geography, as Britain was bound to the continent of Europe —could scarcely hope to maintain her hard-won rank of a Great Power if the U.S.S.R. and a militantly Nationalist China, reunited by Russian aid, were to league themselves together against her. Poor as Japan was in minerals, her economic interests in Manchuria were not superfluities but vital necessities of her national life.

[6] *Ibid.*, 122.

[7] *Ibid.*, 249.

(…)

> Thus the international position of Japan — with Nationalist China, Soviet Russia, and the race-conscious English-speaking peoples of the Pacific closing in upon her — had suddenly become precarious again.

(…)

> Circumstances were moulding the foreign relations of Japan. Whether the foreign policy that was developing were justifiable or not, I cannot say on this evidence that it was the result of any over-all conspiracy as alleged in the indictment or that it, in any way, indicated the existence of any such conspiracy. In my opinion the prosecution allegation in this respect is a fantastic one.
>
> Manchuria itself was a pressing problem for Japan at that time and the evidence, in my opinion, does not lead us to any design against any country beyond Manchuria.[8]

Politicians' inexcusable ignorance about Manchurian situation

One often hears that the Japanese military, acting independently, caused the Manchurian Incident. One also hears that the incident shows how powerless politics was in the face of those independent actions and the might of weapons. However, such a view risks unfairly placing all the blame on the military, and does not reveal the whole truth. Konoe Fumimaro, who in some ways had keen discernment about the trends of the times, and excellent insight, wrote the following in his aforementioned memoirs.

> At the time many intellectuals thought that the military had caused the Manchurian Incident, and that the Japanese people considered it an annoyance. Foreigners, especially Britons and Americans, embraced that view, and ever since then have come to believe that Japan's diplomacy was under the thumb of the military. Certainly, on the surface it appears that the military was the driving force behind Japanese diplomacy after the Manchurian Incident. It is true that there are many aspects of the military actions that warrant criticism. I can understand why the Americans thought that Japan's diplomacy could resume its proper course if the military's high-handedness were curbed. I do not fault them for hoping that a liberal government would rise. However, I considered this way of thinking superficial and shallow, and dismissive of national destiny, which lies at the root of it all.
>
> (…)
>
> I told Saionji[9] that "the direction Japan is taking now is being propelled by the world situation. Military uprising or no, Manchurian Incident or no, whatever happens is the destiny of the people. As long as politicians fail to understand the people, … the military will become the driving force, and our nation will continue to move forward

[8] *Ibid*., 249-51.

[9] Saionji Kinmochi, prime minister of Japan (1906-08, 1911-12)

> in this direction. … To reclaim possession of politics from the military, politicians must first perceive Japan's destiny, and stave off that destiny by stealing the march on the military and implementing needed reforms."[10]

Konoe reports that Saionji laughed and commented, "There you go again with your talk about stealing the march!"

Konoe had made similar remarks earlier, specifically in 1936. I will cite from them to shed light on his opinions.

> I hear an inordinate amount of talk about national policy. Politicians should determine national policy, and the military should base its defense plans on that policy. However, until now politicians have been overly immersed in party politics, and have not had the time to consider broader national policy. … Diplomacy has suffered the same fate. It seems that there are quite a few people in the Foreign Ministry who are fluent in a foreign language and skilled in diplomatic matters. But how many of them possess strategic insight? Since the end of the Great War, Japan's diplomacy has largely been a matter of cooperation. Cooperation is, of course, all well and good. But this cooperation was not based on any policy or plan. We simply accepted and followed what the Powers said, assuming that that was the way of the world and inevitable. It is not surprising that the military and the public were resentful. … I believe that the military is so powerful now because it has a clear objective and a plan for Japan. … Today we hear indignant voices claiming that political parties, both in Japan and abroad, are being led astray by the military. But when those who have a plan meet those without one, the former will surely prevail. Politicians should cease being indignant and spend more time educating themselves.[11]

When politicians become absorbed in trivial matters, are consumed by political strife, fail to show concern about their country's future, and fail to create fundamental national policies, it is right and proper for the military, responsible for national defense, to act independently. Konoe was scolding politicians for behaving like spectators. Along these same lines, how much of the blame for the incident can we place on the shoulders of Shidehara Kijūrō, who was foreign minister at the time?

In his memoirs Hayashi Kyūjirō, consul-general at Fengtian between 1928 and 1932, often states that Shidehara lacked an assertive policy toward Manchuria. In 1929 Hayashi sensed a pressing need to unify official Japanese organizations in Manchuria, with a view to reconciling the China policies of the military and the Foreign Ministry. He prepared a proposal whose objectives were (1) full control of the military, which was insisting on independent command authority, and (2) the establishment and development of Japanese diplomacy toward China. Although Foreign Minister Shidehara was not opposed to the proposal, neither did he have anything positive to say

[10] Yabe, *op. cit.*

[11] *Ibid.*

about it. Hayashi's efforts were met with silence from the Foreign Ministry. His comment at the time was, "Foreign Minister Shidehara is a sensible man, but he is not resourceful."[12]

On July 1, 1931, not long before the Manchurian Incident, Hayashi met with Shidehara and explained that a collision between Japan and China was inevitable (the Wanbaoshan Incident[13] had already occurred). Hayashi emphasized, as he had in his proposal, that since any reckless act was certain to be met with international opposition, Japan's first priority was to gain control over the Japanese public and private sectors in Manchuria. "Precisely for that reason, I had previously urged the foreign minister to give immediate attention to the unification of our institutions in Manchuria: 'I hope Your Excellency will take decisive action for the sake of our nation's long-term future.' I pleaded with the Foreign Minister for about an hour, but he only expatiated about the railway negotiations and, regrettably, said nothing about the essential points that I had raised."

After returning to Manchuria at the end of July, Hayashi paid a visit to Uchida Kōsai, who had just been appointed president of the South Manchuria Railway, in Dalian. He told Uchida about the military's insistence on a strong stance, and said that if that was not restrained immediately, there was a real risk of serious consequences.

> I told Count Uchida, "The current government is indecisive and unreliable. Your Excellency is a veteran of the halls of Kasumigaseki, and a senior statesman who enjoys the same courtesies at Court as does a former official. I beg you to return to Japan immediately and arrange to have an audience with the Emperor. Once you have explained the situation, His Majesty will issue an imperial command, and a serious crisis shall have been averted." But the Count did not seem to be listening to me, and I later heard that after I left, he said something about 'Hayashi's seeming agitated,' which I found terribly disheartening.[14]

In 1929, after having completed an inspection tour of Manchuria, Tōgo Shigenori presented a detailed description of the situation there to Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal Makino Nobuaki: "If nothing is done, we must expect an explosion / upheaval at any time." Count Makino seemed shocked: "Has the situation worsened to that extent?" These anecdotes clearly convey the dearth of understanding (and misplaced optimism) on the part of elder statesmen Shidehara, Uchida, and Makino where the actual state of affairs in Manchuria was concerned. The time had come when even Shigemitsu Mamoru, often called "Little Shidehara," had no choice but to criticize Shidehara diplomacy.

> There was no question that Foreign Minister Shidehara had undeviatingly followed the right path in his foreign diplomacy, but his weak point was that in a matter of life and death for Japan, such as the problem of Manchuria, he had no plan of solution that would convince the Japanese people. With the country's peril before its eyes, the Government still lacked the courage and the ability to provide

[12] Hayashi Kyūjirō, *op. cit.*

[13] Conflict between Korean and Chinese farmers over irrigation near Changchun, Manchuria.

[14] *Ibid.*

> constructive leadership and ensure a solution. That was the opening scene of the tragedy, and a major cause of the failure of liberal principles in Japan."[15]

Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, a historian specializing in Japanese diplomatic history, wrote the following about the failure of the government and Japanese diplomatic officials to arrive at a proper understanding of the situation in Manchuria, and to forge remedial policies.

> It is fair to conclude that diplomacy had become disengaged from reality, or that reality had parted ways with diplomacy. No matter how one describes the situation, Japan was certainly not behaving like an organic entity. This was the first time since the last days of the Tokugawa Shogunate when diplomacy did not represent actual power, and the lack of political power became obvious to the outside world.[16]

Accordingly, we can assume that the responsibility for the Manchurian Incident (if indeed any of us was responsible) lies with the military or the politicians. When politicians do not concern themselves with the fate of their nation, but instead are motivated by immediate profits and self-preservation, the people become enraged and the military rises up, just as in the past.

League of Nations' admonition to Japan ignores the facts

As already stated, in March 1933 Japan reacted to the recommendations in the Lytton Report by withdrawing from the League of Nations in March 1933. As grounds for its departure, the Japanese provided the following:

> The Japanese Government now finds themselves compelled to conclude that Japan and the other Members of the League entertain different views on the manner to achieve peace in the Far East and the Japanese Government are obliged to feel that they have now reached the limit of their endeavours to co-operate with the League of Nations in regard to the Sino-Japanese differences.[17]

In his *Study of Japanese-Manchurian Relations* political scientist Rōyama Masamichi provides comments and criticisms with respect to several aspects of the polarization between Japan's position and the Lytton Report.

(1) The Japanese had requested (and hoped) that a comprehensive examination of China be an important part of the investigation into the Manchurian Incident. Unfortunately, the Lytton Commission ultimately deferred to Western notions of China, notions that prevailed when the

[15] Shigemitsu, *op. cit.*, 62.

[16] Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, *Nihon gaikōshi, gekan* (History of Japanese foreign policy, vol. 2) (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha, 1942).

[17] Rōyama Masamichi, *Nichi-Man kankei no kenkyū* (Study of Japan-Manchuria relations) (Tokyo: Shibun Shoin, 1933); Full text of "Japan's case in the Sino-Japanese dispute as presented before the Special Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations," Geneva, 1933, https://archive.org/stream/japanscaseinsino00leag/japanscaseinsino00leag_djvu.txt.

Nine-Power Treaty was concluded at the Washington Naval Conference. Consequently, the commission assumed that China would be well on her way to becoming a unified nation once certain conditions had been met. This was the statement in the report that was most at odds with Japanese public opinion.

(2) The commission's decision not to recognize Manzhouguo was a "policy value judgement" that turned a deaf ear to the dialectical developmental relationship between the causes of the incident and the reality it spawned.

(3) The commission gave highest priority to avoiding any territorial changes that might conflict with the Nine-Power Treaty, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, or other elements of the international peace machinery. Therefore, it was attempting to legitimize the autonomous status of Manchuria by once again declaring it an autonomous region. However, if it is the relationship with the international peace machinery that is at issue, the investigative team condemned actions taken in self-defense in the narrow sense of military action, and only in that sense. It did not acknowledge the broad scope of political actions, and completely ignored and dismissed statements from prominent citizens and leaders of various organizations who champion the government of Manzhouguo, not to mention residents who are staunch advocates of *baojing anmin*. Not only is this an unjust observation, but it is also a deliberate acknowledgement of conflict with the international peace machinery, and thus obstructs the path to resolution.

(4) All things considered, we can assume that, when investigating and evaluating the facts, the commission always had Japan's assertions in mind, and was determined to refute them.

Joseph Grew, the US ambassador to Japan at the time, was certainly not enthusiastically pro-Japan. Even so, on February 23, 1933, he committed his doubts about the peace machinery, particularly the shortcomings and flaws of the League of Nations, to his diary.

> In this diary I recently said that I was in accord with the Report and Recommendations of the League of Nations in the Sino-Japanese dispute. This statement must be modified, as indeed many of the statements in the diary, in which I am merely thinking aloud, are modified from time to time on maturer thought and consideration. The recommendations may be all right in theory, but the trouble is that they are ineffective in practice because they don't fit the facts and at least at present are unworkable. … Yet the more one mulls over the whole problem, the more one is inclined to question whether the peace machinery which the world has been trying so earnestly and painstakingly to erect these last fourteen years is basically sound, or rather whether it is basically practical.[18]

Then Grew proceeded to compare the Manchurian Incident with the Spanish-American War in 1898.

> To let one's imagination rove a bit – compare the Manchurian situation in 1931 with the Cuban situation in 1898. If the latter crisis had developed subsequent to the

[18] Joseph C. Grew, *Ten Years in Japan: A Contemporary Record* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), 78.

> conclusion of the Kellogg pact, and if the *Maine* had been blown up in Havana Harbor, resulting in a war psychology sweeping over our country like a forest fire, and the words "Remember the *Maine*" on the lips of every man, woman, and child in the land, could our Government ever have prevented hostilities with Spain? McKinley wanted to avoid war in 1898 but couldn't. Even if the Kellogg Pact had existed at that date, might we also not have occupied Cuba without declaring war, on the grounds of self-defense, forced by public opinion to do so?[19]

After stating that the Kellogg-Briand Pact could not prevent war, he arrives at the following conclusion:

> Clearly, then, our peace machinery while magnificent in theory is ineffective in practice. It is ineffective because it is superficial. It is like a poultice prescribed for cancer by the surgeon long after the cancer has been allowed to develop.
>
> (…)
>
> The future peace machinery of the world must … attempt treatment long before the disease itself materializes. … To put the matter in a nutshell, the peace machinery of the world must be far more radical, far more prescient, far more concerned with facts, conditions, and circumstances than with theories than it is today, if it is ever to succeed in abolishing war.[20]

Japanese public opinion celebrates Manchurian Incident

An article in a German newspaper suggested that Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations represented the beginning of a breakdown in relations between the Western nations and Asia. The Manchurian Incident also signaled a time when, in Japan, slogans like "Asia for the Asians" and "Turn not toward the West but the East" began to circulate.

Once Matsuoka Yōsuke set foot on Japanese soil after having delivered the speech announcing Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations, the Japanese public greeted him with wild enthusiasm. Matsuoka arrived in Yokohama on April 28, 1933 on the *Asama Maru*, which sailed to Japan via the US. The crowds waiting to welcome him thronged the pier, and at Tokyo Station schoolchildren lined up to greet him, waving the Rising Sun flag. The newspapers devoted a great deal of space to the event, describing Matsuoka as "a brave general who exercised independent diplomacy in an heroic battle for justice." Radio stations broadcast every detail of his return nationwide. He might as well have been a victorious general returning triumphantly from battle. Impressed by the public response, US Ambassador Grew wrote that Matsuoka's "fellow-countrymen looked upon him as a modern Horatius defending his people against the onslaughts of

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*

the world. His arrival home was the occasion for a public patriotic demonstration of a size seldom seen in Japan."[21]

Nor was it only the newspapers that exulted when the Manchurian Incident erupted, and were moved to commit their enthusiasm to paper.

I have already mentioned that by January of 1932, the year following the Lugou Bridge Incident, hostilities had spread to Shanghai, where the 1st Shanghai Incident occurred. It was there that the famous story of the Three Human Bombs unfolded. Their self-sacrificing actions at the Battle of Miao Xingzhen brought them eternal fame.

The story of the heroic deeds of three Japanese soldiers armed with Bangalore torpedoes, charged the enemy's barbed-wire barricades, became known to everyone in Japan, and became the topic of more than one song. The lyrics of the most famous of them, "The Three Heroes Who Became Human Bombs," were written by renowned poet Yosano Tekkan, who was clearly moved by their bravery. It begins as follows:

> It was 5:00 a.m. on February 22nd
> On a freezing cold night
> Their comrades were already attacking
> The enemy's encampment at Miao Xingzhen.[22]

Also deeply impressed by the heroes' ultimate sacrifice was Tekkan's wife, Yosano Akiko. She published an essay collection entitled *Be the Victors!* soon after learning about the incident, in which she wrote the following:

> There are no soldiers in this world more stalwart than Japanese military men. But our civilians must emulate the courage of our soldiers, both in their work and their pursuit of knowledge. Young men and women, especially, must be inspired to live as boldly as the three heroes who rushed forward with their bombs. Soldiers should not be the only victors. Each and every Japanese must be tenacious on their journeys toward victory.[23]

Yosano Akiko's zeal must have intensified, since in June of the same year in *Japanese Women*, a poetry collection, she included "Morning Song," which she dedicated to the Japanese people. The

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[21] Hosoya Chihiro, *Nihon gaikō no zahyō* (Coordinates of Japanese Diplomacy) (Tokyo: Chūōkōron-sha, 1988); US Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1933, The Far East, Volume III, Document 772: The Ambassador in Japan (Grew) to the Acting Secretary of State, Tokyo, December 14, 1933*; https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1933v03/d772

[22] "Bakudan san yūshi no uta" (Song of the Three Heroes Who Became Human Bombs), *Gekkan Seiron*, 07 February 2024, https://www.sankei.com/article/20240207-LPHHKEILKNC4ZMWNZBNCLTRPSY/?outputType=theme_monthly-seiron.

[23] Yosano Akiko, "Yūshōsha to nare" (Be a victor!) in *Yosano Akiko: hyōron chosakushū* (Critical essays of Yosano Akiko) (Tokyo: Tenrai Shobō, 1934).

song opens with Yosano's retelling of the heroic deeds of the three "human bombs" She then exhorts her compatriots to follow their example.

> We civilians may not go to war
> But we serve our country all the same, to the best of our ability,
> Through unceasing, albeit tiny efforts.
> For instance, this song of mine
> Was inspired by the men who charged ahead,
> Grasping their explosives tightly,
> And dashed them against the enemy's barbed wire.
> Though a powerless woman,
> I feel at one with them.
> We are truly fortunate to have inherited
> Such admirable traditions from our forefathers.[24]

It is difficult to believe that this is the same poet who, in 1904, during the Russo-Japanese War, wrote a poem entitled "My brother, you must not die." The earlier poem made an appearance in every single Japanese history textbook as an example of the work of the accomplished Yosano Akiko, an "antiwar poet."

I have introduced this work from the pen of a famous female poet to provide a glimpse into public opinion at that time. The Chinese had heaped hostile acts and insults on the Japanese people for many years. Consequently, the Japanese were encouraged by the Manchurian Incident, which arose "like a bolt of lightning piercing the dark clouds"[25] over Japan, to use the words of Konoe Fumimaro. This particular poem of Akiko's, however, will never appear in any Japanese history textbook.

[24] Yosano Akiko, "Nihon kokumin asa no uta" (Morning song for the citizens of Japan), *Nihon josei*, *Nihon kokumin bekkan (Japanese women*, supplement to *Citizens of Japan*), June 1932.

[25] Yabe, *op. cit.*

6. WAS MANCHURIA EVER PART OF CHINA?

Brief history of the people of Manchuria

Was Manchuria ever Chinese territory? Any consideration of the thorny Manchurian problem inevitably takes us back to this simple question. If Manchuria did not "belong" to China, then characterizations of the Manchurian Incident and the establishment of Manzhouguo as acts of Japanese aggression become baseless, and thus moot. To arrive at the optimal answer to this question, we must rely not on ideology, but on 2,000 years of Manchurian history.

The oldest Manchurian ethnic groups whose names appear in recorded history are the Sushen and the Yemaek people, who inhabited northeastern and southwestern Manchuria, respectively. The Sushen were quasi-legendary people who are thought to be ethnically Tungusic; they were known as Mishihase in ancient Japanese historical records. The Yemaek were of mixed Tungusic and Mongolian blood. There was no Han presence in Manchuria in ancient times.

Emperor Shi, the first ruler of the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE), unified China, but never succeeded in gaining control of Manchuria and Mongolia. Instead, he had the Great Wall built and maintained to discourage incursions of the Beidi (Northern barbarians). From this perspective alone, we can assume that Manchuria was not Han territory 2,000 years ago.

Emperor Wu of the Western Han dynasty (202 BCE - 9 CE) extended his influence into the Korean peninsula, but some Yemaek established the kingdom of Buyeo in Manchuria; others founded the state of Goguryeo. In 668, during the Tang dynasty (618-907), Tang and Silla combined forces and destroyed Goguryeo. Surviving Goguryeo retainers moved to eastern Manchuria, where they established the kingdom of Balhae. Known as the "prosperous country in the East," Balhae and Japan maintained amicable relations, but Balhae was destroyed by the nomadic Khitans in the 10th century. Nevertheless, the Khitans' domain encompassed only the western half of what had been Balhae, i.e., reaching as far as the area later covered by the South Manchuria Railway. The Manchus, who were descended from the Balhae, established the Jin dynasty (1115-1234) and, forming an alliance with the Song, destroyed the Khitans. The Manchus then moved their forces into central China and proceeded to create a vast domain extending from Manchuria and Mongolia in the north to the Yellow River in the south. Next the Manchus invaded China and conquered the Han. However, in the first half of the 13th century, the Mongols rose up on the banks of the Onon River and overthrew the Jurchen Jin dynasty (1115-1234). Soon the Mongols established the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), brought down the Song dynasty (960-1279) and built an empire unprecedented in scale, encompassing Manchuria and all of China.

In the latter half of the 14th century the fortunes of the Mongols were beginning to ebb. The Han drove them to the north again, and founded the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Although the Ming expelled the Mongol forces from Manchuria, they never achieved complete control of the indigenous Manchus. We know that Ming authority was limited to a small part of the area downstream along the Liao River from the famous Willow Palisade, a barrier system constructed in the 15th century, designed to control movement between Manchuria and China proper. The Jurchen people, Manchus descended from the Balhae and Jin, became firmly rooted in all of

Manchuria. They never adopted the Han Ming calendar, and preserved their independent status in other ways as well.

Toward the end of the 16th century, Manchu Nurhaci raised an army, and in a little over 30 years, united the Manchus and established a dynasty, commonly called Later Jin (1616-1630). The year 1636 marked the beginning of the Qing dynasty, which persisted until 1912. In 1644 the Qing capitalizing on Ming internecine strife, occupied Beijing and set out to rule the Han. Since there were several hundred times more Han than Manchus (who numbered about one million), the Manchus moved to China. As a result, Manchuria became a vast wasteland. But the Qing continued to show respect to their homeland, both to preserve its integrity and to guarantee themselves a refuge in case their attempt to rule the Han failed. They implemented a *fengjin* (prohibition) policy, which barred the Han from moving to Manchuria. Following the Ming example, the Qing built willow palisades to keep Mongols and Koreans out of Manchuria. The Manchu royalty governed in a manner that differentiated Manchuria from China. For instance, generals in command of the three eastern provinces were always Manchus, never Han.

Having examined 2,000 years' worth of Manchurian history, we now know that the Han never ruled the Manchus. The Manchus sometimes conquered China, but the Han never controlled Manchuria. It is true that during the Han, Tang, and Ming dynasties, the Han forces extended their influence into Manchuria. However, this was but a temporary phenomenon and involved only a narrow strip of southern Manchuria, and Liaodong. History instructs us that Manchuria belonged to the Manchus. There is no evidence to support the Han claim of territorial rights.

Sun Yat-sen's perception of Manchuria

There is evidence demonstrating that Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the 1911 Revolution, did not believe that Manchuria was Chinese territory. For instance, in August 1905, during the Russo-Japanese War, Chinese revolutionaries studying in Japan convened in Tokyo at a gathering called the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance. There the three revolutionary groups merged and selected Sun Yat-sen as their leader. The 8,000 attendees represented the 21 regions of China: the 17 Chinese provinces (with the exception of Gansu province), and Nanyang (Southeast Asia), Shanghai, Tianjin, and Hong Kong. Regional branch leaders were appointed, but not for Manchuria (the three eastern provinces: Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Mukden), as no branches had been established there, despite the fact that there were plenty of pure-blooded Manchus studying in Japan. This writer considers this fact the most compelling piece of evidence proving that neither Sun Yat-sen nor the participants in the Tokyo gathering considered the three eastern provinces, i.e., Manchuria, as Han Chinese territory. Moreover, the slogan used for the 1911 Revolution, *mieman xinghan* (exterminate the Manchus and revive the Han), did not cover a scenario in which the Han possessed Manchuria.

A second piece of evidence is Sun Yat-sen's promise to cede Manchuria to Japan. He made this promise more than once, but for our purposes I shall refer to an anecdote included in Mori Kaku's memoirs. It was July 1913, the time of the Second Revolution, this one an attempt to overthrow Yuan Shikai. At that juncture the revolutionaries were desperate for financial aid and weapons. Mitsui & Co. executive Mori Kaku arranged for negotiations between Sun supporter Yamada Junzaburō, then in Nanjing, and Sun Yat-sen to discuss the exchange of Manchuria for sufficient weapons to arm two divisions and ¥20 million in cash. The conversation involved Yamada,

Miyazaki Tōten (another Sun supporter), Sun Yat-sen, and Tongmenghui member Hu Hanmin. However, during the negotiations Sun also consulted with fellow revolutionary Huang Xing in a separate room. Ultimately Sun gave his blessing to the exchange. Then Huang Xing visited Japan, acting as Sun's proxy, where he met with former Prime Minister Katsura Tarō. They were just about to make final arrangements when the revolutionary forces suffered a defeat, compelling Sun Yat-sen and Huang Xing to seek asylum in Japan. The plan fizzled out in the face of opposition from the Yamamoto (Gonnohyōe) Cabinet and from Yamagata Aritomo, who said, "Manchuria is within our sphere of influence. Why should we have to buy it?"[1]

Here is another thought-provoking anecdote. Before and during the Great East Asian War, exciting adventure stories set in Asia were very popular among young boys. They bore titles like *300 Leagues Across Enemy Lines*, *Dawn of Asia*, and *Iron Man of the East.* The author of these books, Yamanaka Minetarō, was a graduate of the Imperial Japanese Army Academy. Employed for a time at one of the Imperial Guard regiments, he later withdrew from the Army War College to participate in Chinese revolutionary activities. Yamanaka served as Sun Yat-sen's chief of staff during the Third Revolution in 1915, when Yuan Shikai declared himself emperor.

In *The Dawn of Asia*, that same Yamanaka Minetarō, using his real name, wrote that at the time of the Third Revolution, he arranged a top-secret meeting between Sun, who had sought refuge in Japan, and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Uehara Yūsaku. According to Yamanaka, Sun Yat-sen was insistent when he made the following proposal to Uehara:

> I can certainly understand why Japan, with its overpopulation problem and minimal resources, would find Manchuria, which is replete with vast plains and valuable natural resources, attractive. The GMD fully understands your position, and is willing to recognize Manchuria as a special region of Japan, and to give Japan priority, as far as opportunities for immigration and development are concerned. However, the three eastern provinces are Chinese territory, and we will under no circumstances relinquish sovereignty over them. If Japan helps us by providing enough Japanese reservists and weapons to form at least three divisions, we will grant special interests to Japan through all of Manchuria.

Sun then proceeded to enumerate a host of privileges he was willing to bestow, including precedence for Japanese advisors. The list was so long that Yamanaka was moved to express amazement.[2]

On one hand, Sun promised to cede special interests in Manchuria, and even Manchuria *per se* to Japan. On the other, he maintained that China had sovereignty over Manchuria. These unsophisticated contradictions were quite typical of Sun. It is possible, however that since 1915,

[1] Mori Kaku denki hensankai (Compilation committee for the biography of Mori Kaku), *Mori Kaku*, ed. Yamaura Kan'ichi (Takayama Shoin, 1941).

[2] Yamanaka Minetarō, *Jitsuroku: Ajia no Akebono: Daisan kakumei no shinsō* (Dawn of Asia: a true account of the Third Revolution) (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju Shinsha, 1962).

the year of the Third Revolution, was also the year Japan presented the Twenty-One Demands, Chinese public opinion influenced Sun's remarks.

Additionally, in January 1907, in a speech delivered while he was an asylee in Japan, Sun Yat-sen said that the objective of the Chinese revolution was to "exterminate the Manchus and revive the Han." Therefore, if Japan would guarantee its support, once the revolution had succeeded, he would cede Manchuria and Mongolia to Japan.[3] (I have already stated that Sun was in agreement with the main aspects of the Twenty-One Demands.)

Judging from the examples I have offered, I believe it is sensible to conclude that Sun Yat-sen and his fellow revolutionary leaders were at best indifferent toward Manchuria. And that indifference is the most convincing evidence that they did not view Manchuria as their homeland. The question of the territorial jurisdiction over Manchuria, which is the fundamental source of the Manchurian problem, can be traced to the deception that was the 1911 Revolution. The true meaning of the philosophy behind "exterminate the Manchus and revive the Han," the slogan of the revolution, was unequivocally "only the Han shall rule the Han," and that is what motivated rejection of the Qing dynasty. Therefore, when the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance was established, the area to be ruled by the Han was assumed to be what I have described as China proper (18 provinces).

But after the revolution a bizarre semantic deception took place. Sun Yat-sen was installed as interim president in January 1912, a year after the revolution. In a declaration marking his appointment, he produced a clever argument: "The lands of the Han, Manchurians, Mongolians, Hui, and Tibetans shall be united into one nation, and the Han, Manchus, Mongolians, Hui, and Tibetans shall be united into one people. We call this a 'union of five races.' Independence is a matter of secession from the Qing, and uniting with the other provinces."[4]

The Manchu Qing dynasty domain embraced the Han, Mongols, the Hui of Xinjiang, and the Tibetans. If the objective of the Han people was to reject and overthrow the Manchus, one would expect the Mongolians, the Hui, and the Tibetans to be liberated from Manchu domination, and for the Manchus to control Manchuria. This is what we call "ethnic self-determination." But Sun did not accept the right of independence for the other four ethnic groups. He maintained that the Qing dynasty domain in its entirety (which he described as "one nation") would now be Han territory. In other words, this was a simple matter of the Han wresting the reins of power from the Manchus, no more, no less. The Han would them subsume the Manchus, Mongolians, Hui, and Tibetans.

When the revolutionaries overthrew the Qing dynasty and established a "new" China (the Republic of China), the new nation's territory should have encompassed, at most, the aforementioned 18 provinces. But what they did was claim all of the territory controlled by the Manchus, including Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet, and call it China. In other words, though the revolutionaries had rejected the Qing dynasty, the new incarnation of China attempted to inherit

[3] Kokuryūkai (Black Dragon Society), *Tōa Senkaku shishi kiden, chūkan* (Chronicles of pioneer patriots of East Asia, vol. 2), ed. Kuzuu Yoshihisa (Tokyo: Kokuryūkai Shuppanbu, 1936).

[4] Stephen Chen and Robert Payne, *Sun Yat-sen: A Portrait* (New York: The John Day Company, 1946), 103.

all its assets. Here lies the deception of the 1911 Revolution – the contradiction between the ideal and the real – that was the primary cause of friction between the Han and their neighbors.

The fact that independence movements have arisen in China in recent years, specifically in Tibet and Xinjiang, can be traced to the failure of the revolutionaries to recognize independence for the Tibetans and the Hui in 1911. For instance, in 1912 Tibet declared independence from the Qing, but the Republic of China refused to recognize that declaration. Then in 1917, the Chinese took advantage of the opportunity presented by Britain's being preoccupied with Europe during World War I. They invaded eastern Tibet and in 1928, when the unification of north and south China had been accomplished, they attempted to annex the eastern half of Tibet by establishing two "new provinces" (Qinghai and Xikang) and incorporating them into China. In 1949, after World War II had ended, the People's Republic of China was established. Millions of "People's Liberation Army" troops invaded eastern Tibet, beginning the communization and colonialization of that region. In 1955, the invasion complete, Xikang province was eliminated since it was no longer necessary. The current Tibetan independence movement is a natural consequence of the 1911 Revolution and other instances of deceit, as well as a Chinese policy of aggression.

Outer Mongolia, too, issued a declaration of independence from China after the 1911 Revolution. The Chinese refused to recognize it, but since Outer Mongolia at first sought shelter under the imperial Russian umbrella, and then turned to the USSR. China was powerless to counter its departure, and nothing has changed since then. Given this situation, was it not reasonable for the Manchu people, after being overpowered by China in the 1911 Revolution, to want to establish an independent nation in their homeland, Manchuria? Was it so strange for Japan, with its extensive interests in Manchuria, to offer its support, when compared with Russia's backing of Outer Mongolia or Britain's of Tibet? The conflict between Japan and China over Manchurian independence began with China's ambition – or perhaps China's grand illusion – to claim the homeland of the Manchus as its own territory. Before branding the Manchurian Incident and Manchurian independence as acts of Japanese aggression, we should be mindful that the root cause of this turmoil was Chinese deception and lust for domination, the culmination of which was the rejection of the Qing dynasty and the seizing of all its assets.

According to Shidehara, Manchuria belonged to Russia

Foreign Minister Shidehara was known for his friendly policy toward China. What was his perception of Manchuria?

In 1931, shortly before the Manchurian Incident, Eugene Chen, foreign minister of the Nationalist Guangdong government, was in Japan on official business. On July 28 and 31 he met with Foreign Minister Shidehara. During those meetings the two men discussed the Manchurian problem. Chen seemed to be asking for a favor, i.e., Japanese recognition of the Guangdong government as the legitimate government of China. In return, the Nationalists would respect Japanese interests in Manchuria. Shidehara replied, "The Chinese people seem to believe that Manchuria is part of China. However, we know that Manchuria once belonged to Russia. After the Boxer Rebellion, we obtained permission from the Russians to install a consul at Yingkou. Since Chinese students are not familiar with their own history, they think that the Chinese reclaimed Manchuria through their own efforts. But it was the Japanese who expelled the Russians from Manchuria." Then Shidehara proceeded to explain Japan's position on Japanese special interests in Manchuria.

> In 1896 China and Russia concluded a secret treaty forming an alliance against a potential threat from Japan (the Li-Lobanov Treaty). The term of that treaty was set at 15 years. During that period the Russo-Japanese War broke out. But in any case, as soon as that treaty was signed, the Russians began work on a Manchurian invasion plan. However, we know from records of negotiations between Japan and Russia prior to the conflict, that the Russians actually perceived Manchuria as an integral part of their territory. China was helpless in the face of this Russian coercion, and uttered not one word of protest. If this situation had been allowed to run its natural course, Manchuria would have, without a doubt, ceased to be Qing territory a long time ago. It was Japanese military intervention that enabled the Qing dynasty to retain this vast, fertile region. During the Russo-Japanese War we trusted the Chinese declaration of strict neutrality and adhered faithfully to our policy of protecting Chinese territorial integrity. Of course, had we known about the terms of the secret Sino-Russian alliance, Japan would have had more than enough reason to abandon that policy and adopt another.[5]
>
> Since the Russo-Japanese War ended Manchuria has made a surprising degree of progress, and has achieved peace and prosperity, the likes of which no other region of China can claim. And the Japanese people are convinced that at least some of that progress is the result of Japanese corporate activity and investment. Japan makes no claim of territorial sovereignty over Manchuria. However, we hope that whether they hail from Japan proper or Korea, the Japanese people will be able to enjoy life in Manchuria, making friends and cooperating with their neighbors, engage in commerce and agriculture, and participate in the economic development of the region. We believe that we have a moral right to these modest objectives.[6]

Even Shidehara was not convinced that Manchuria was unqualifiedly Chinese territory. His remarks reflect the way in which the Japanese people perceived Manchuria.

[5] The existence of the Li-Lobanov Treaty became known through a statement made by Wellington Koo (Gu Weijun) at the Washington Naval Conference (see Chapter 6.2).

[6] Suma Yakichirō, "Zai Shi jū yū ichi nen to gaikō hiroku" (Eleven years in China; Confidential diplomatic records) and "Shidehara gaishō, Chin Yūjin kaidan roku) (Conversation between Foreign Minister Shidehara and Chen Youren) in *Gaimushō* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), ed., *Nihon gaikō nenpyō narabi ni shuyō bunsho* (Chronology and important papers on Japanese diplomacy) (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1966).

7. THE MANCHURIAN INCIDENT AND THE FOUNDING OF A STATE

Japanese efforts stabilize Manchuria

One of the principal flaws of the IMTFE was the court's classification of the Manchurian Incident as the starting point of the 2nd Sino-Japanese War, and its complete dismissal of the events that led up to the incident.

I have already shown that the Manchurian Incident was a *consequence* of the friction and strife between Japan and China that persisted for a quarter century after the Russo-Japanese War.

By winning that war, Japan rescued Manchuria from the clutches of Russia. The Japanese laid the foundation for prosperity, building a railroad in the wilderness and establishing industries. It was the Japanese who breathed new life into Manchuria by building a modern civilization in a region that had been left to languish because of restrictive Qing policies. At the core of Manchurian progress was the South Manchuria Railway. After the 1911 Revolution, China proper was plagued by battles between various warlord factions, whose troops, numbering in the neighborhood of two million men, were constantly at each other's throats. When communist forces backed by the USSR infiltrated China, chaos and devastation became a seemingly endless blight. But north of Shanhai Pass it was a different story. The ravages of conflict so usual in China were nowhere to be seen in Manchuria, which developed into a peaceful, starkly contrasting preserve. It was an ideal confluence: order kept by only 10,000 men from Japan's Guandong Army, and the prayers of the Manchu people who were horrified by the strife in China proper, and who fervently desired *baojing anmin*. As many as one million Han per year from China proper, moved to Manchuria to escape that strife. In the autumn of 1927 Thomas W. Lamont, representing J.P. Morgan & Co., made an inspection tour of Manchuria. He described his observations in a letter to US Under Secretary of State Robert E. Olds, as follows:

> My own observation … is that today Manchuria is about the only stable region in all China and that with the Japanese there it is likely to be more of a stabilizing force in Chinese affairs than it is to be a disturbing element. The Japanese are developing Manchuria not chiefly in the military sense but in an economic way. They are doing this not for the benefit of the Japanese colonists who go to Manchuria in only small numbers. As a matter of fact, development is working out in the interest of the Chinese. With the unsettled and belligerent conditions covering so large a part of China, the Chinese are now pouring by the thousands into South Manchuria in order to escape the banditry, looting and despoiling to which they are subjected elsewhere.[1]

Lamont's observations were accurate, and his judgements fair. As a result of developments in Manchuria like those he described, its population, 18 million at the time of the 1911 Revolution, had ballooned to 30 million by the time the Manchurian Incident broke out 25 years later. I have already mentioned that in 1927, 20 years after the customs authority in Dalian opened, there was evidence of remarkable growth: the trade volume for China proper was 2.64 times the 1907 figure,

[1] Tansill, *op. cit.*, 83.

and that for Manchuria 6.55 times. It was, unquestionably, Japanese military and economic endeavors that brought peace and progress to Manchuria.

What if Japan had known about secret pact between China and Russia?

In order to elucidate the true cause of the Manchurian problem, we must return to the Russo-Japanese War. What led to that conflict was the secret treaty extorted by Russia from China in 1896 as compensation for the Tripartite Intervention. In addition to stating that Russia and China would cooperate if either were to go to war with Japan, the treaty stipulated that a trans-Manchurian railway would be built connecting the Trans-Siberian railway and Vladivostok. The intended use for that railroad, the Chinese Eastern Railway, was transporting Russian troops to the Far East. It did indeed facilitate the Russian invasion of Manchuria, and served as the ideal environment for the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War. Actually, the Japanese did not find out about the secret treaty until 1922, at the Washington Naval Conference (see Chapters 3.1 and 6.2).

If the Japanese had known about the secret treaty at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan could certainly have demanded that China cede all of Manchuria to Japan. And if at that time Japan had gained possession of Manchuria, no Manchurian problem would have arisen. Furthermore, the ¥2 billion debt that Japan incurred during the Russo-Japanese War amounted to a total of ¥6 billion, when one combines principal and interest. At the time of the Manchurian Incident, Japan was still in the process of repaying that debt.

Lytton Report: Manchurian problems "extremely complicated"

The Report of the Commission of Enquiry, commonly known as the Lytton Report, was the product of the League of Nations' investigation into the Manchurian Incident. The authors of that report were not wholeheartedly sympathetic toward Japan by any stretch of the imagination. Still, they seemed to empathize significantly with Japanese anxiety about communism. The following excerpt aptly describes Japan's growing concern about the communization of Manchuria:

> As the Soviet Government and the Third International had adopted a policy opposed to all imperialist Powers which maintained relations with China on the basis of the existing treaties, it seemed probable that they would support China in the struggle for the recovery of sovereign rights. This development revived all the old anxieties and suspicions of Japan towards her Russian neighbour. This country, with which she had once been at war, had, during the years which followed that war, become a friend and ally. Now this relationship was changed, and the possibility of a danger from across the North-Manchurian border again became a matter of concern to Japan. The likelihood of an alliance between the Communist doctrines in the North and the anti-Japanese propaganda of the Kuomintang in the South made the desire to impose between the two a Manchuria which should be free from both increasingly felt in Japan. Japanese misgivings have been still further increased in the last few years by the predominant influence acquired by the U.S.S.R. in Outer Mongolia and the growth of Communism in China.[2]

[2] Commission of Enquiry, *op. cit.*, 36-37.

Additionally, a chapter in the same report entitled "Principles and Conditions of Settlement" acutely pinpoints the crux of the Manchurian problem.

> It must be apparent to every reader of the preceding chapters that the issues involved in this conflict are not as simple as they are often represented to be. They are, on the contrary, exceedingly complicated, and only an intimate knowledge of all the facts, as well as of their historical background, should entitle anyone to express a definite opinion upon them. This is not a case in which one country has declared war on another country without previously exhausting the opportunities for conciliation provided in the Covenant of the League of Nations. Neither is it a simple case of the violation of the frontier of one country by the armed forces of a neighbouring country, because in Manchuria there are many features without an exact parallel in other parts of the world.[3]

This is a masterfully written passage, which fully conveys the complexity of the Manchurian Incident and the depth of its historical background. The incident was decidedly not an event that could be simply defined as an "invasion." If it had been an invasion, then what should we call Russia's actions *vis à vis* Outer Mongolia, the three Baltic states, Finland, and so forth? Dispossession? Annexation? Colonization? What about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan accomplished with the investment of more than 100,000 regular army troops? If these actions, obviously invasions, are not to be called invasions,[4] then applying that label to the Manchurian Incident is a mindless exercise and an obscene distortion of history.

If we contemplate the fact that the Manchurian Incident arose from the complex relationship between Japan and China, one with no parallel elsewhere in the world, then we should not find it at all difficult to interpret it as a consequence, not a cause or starting point.

Ideals behind Manzhouguo founding expressed in proclamation and national anthem

A proclamation of the establishment of Manzhouguo was issued on March 1 of the first year of the Datong era (1932). It celebrates the ideals upon which Manzhouguo was founded.

> 1. We believe that statecraft should be founded upon the principle of Tao or the Way, and Tao founded upon Tien or Heaven. The principle on which this new State is based is to follow Tien or Heaven that the people may have peace and security. The government must be approved by the people and no man's personal views shall be permitted to influence the affairs of the State.
>
> 2. There shall be no discrimination with respect to race and caste among those people who now reside within the territory of the new State. Besides the races of the Hans, Manchus, Mongols, Japanese and Koreans, the peoples of other foreign countries may upon application have their rights guaranteed.

[3] *Ibid.*, 126.

[4] NHK and other media outlets call them "military interventions."

> 3. In internal affairs the new State will reject the policies adopted in the dark days of the past. It will revise laws and enforce local autonomy, draft able men into the service of the government and elevate the officials deserving promotion … promote and popularize education, respect Li-chiao, the teachings of Confucianism, and apply the principle of Wang-tao, the Way of Benevolent Ruler … . These, we believe will enlighten the people to maintain the honor of perpetuating the peace of the Far East and thus set an example of model government to the world.
>
> 4. The foreign policy of the new State shall be to seek and further promote cordial relations with foreign powers by winning their confidence and respect and to observe strictly international conventions. … Foreign investments by any nation shall be welcomed for the furtherance of trade and the exploitation of natural resources, thus bringing the principles of the Open Door and Equal Opportunity and the like to a fuller realization.
>
> The foregoing articles constitute the fundamental principles under-lying the establishment of the new State. The newly-formed Government hereby pledges upon oath to the thirty million inhabitants that these shall be faithfully carried out.[5]

The authors of this proclamation had clearly reflected on China's evils, notably xenophobia and betrayal, not to mention the many years of tyranny under the two Zhangs. They produced a lofty declaration embodying the ideals underlying the founding of a benevolent government predicated on harmony among the five races. We can sense the sincerity of its messages both by absorbing its words and by reading between the lines. The ideals are sound. The writing is admirable. Critics often indicate that Manzhouguo was not always governed in a manner that reflected its founding ideals. Still, the dismissal — even rejection — by the rest of the world of a new nation, especially one established with such lofty ideals, is truly heartbreaking.

In September 1933 the *London Times* carried an article describing the situation in Manzhouguo two years after its founding. I am bringing some excerpts to readers' attention because it is noteworthy, that the correspondent's critical comments notwithstanding, he also expressed appreciation of the steady progress Manzhouguo was making.

> The traveller will be impressed by the rapid progress made within the last year and a half in the field of finance. The currency has been stabilized, and that alone represents an inestimable blessing to a country formerly flooded with the worthless paper of the war-lords.
>
> (…)
>
> The traveller will find foreign opinion favourably disposed towards the Japanese, though justifiably anxious about the future of foreign commercial interests. It is a relief, he will be told, to deal with people who do what they say they are going to do

5 https://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=Government_Organization_Law_(The_Government_Organic_Law)_Ordinance_No._1_of_the_First_Year_of_Tatung_(1932)&oldid=13302240.

> – who are effective. Schemes on which the Chinese have been for thirty years promising an immediate start are now being quickly carried out.
>
> (…)
>
> One must write of Manchukuo as a *fait accompli*; the rights and wrongs of Japan's actions two years ago are no longer relevant to either the present or the future of the Far East. Manchuria is undergoing what may be best described as enlightened exploitation. The best proof that it is enlightened is that the 30,000,000 inhabitants will benefit from the process. They will, of course, not benefit nearly as much as the Japanese; but the Japanese are doing most of the work and may justly claim a lion's share of the profits.[6]

It is fair to conclude that this report is an objective portrayal of the state of things in Manzhouguo. It came at a point somewhat removed from the Manchurian Incident and the founding of the new state, when Manzhouguo was making steady progress toward stability and growth.

The US was welcoming when the Russians overthrew an empire and established a despotic regime; the Americans even called Russia a "democracy." I find it odd and unfortunate that they could not bring themselves to show the same generosity to Manzhouguo which, at least in its early days, certainly had the potential to grow into a model nation for Asia, if not the world.

A nation is a political community that aspires to actualize ethical ideas. One might assume that this definition would have resonated in China, with its tradition of Confucianist thought. But the real politics of China were such that lawlessness was showing no signs of abating. Ideals like the "ethical state" and "benevolent government" seemed to have vanished. By foolishly mistaking communist Russia for a benevolent government, Sun Yat-sen helped pave the way for communist China. However, subsequent history has proven that communism is ultimately red imperialism whose basis is survival of the fittest, a ruthless politics of terror, tyranny, and exploitation. Into such an environment, the emergence of Manzhouguo, which upheld the ideals of benevolent government amid the unceasing chaos of East Asia, should go down in history as a manifestation of human aspiration, even if its reality did not perfectly match the ideals upon which it was founded.

The words of the national anthem of Manzhouguo proudly echo the national ideals stated in the Proclamation of the Establishment of Manzhouguo. I would like to acquaint readers with them, as they reject xenophobia and militancy, instead emphasizing ethnic coexistence and harmony, and benevolent government.

> A new Manchuria has appeared.
> Crowned by heaven and arising from Earth,
> This new Manchuria is our heaven and earth.
> Here we shall build our nation,
> A nation that knows no suffering, no sorrow,
> No hatred — only love.
> Thirty million people, thirty million people!

[6] MANCHUKUO TO-DAY: 1. THE JAPANESE AS CONQUERORS*, The Times (London, England)*, 11 September 1933.

Though our number may increase tenfold,
We shall still enjoy freedom.
Cherishing benevolence and justice,
And holding courtesy in high esteem,
Let us elevate ourselves.
Our households are already secure,
Our nation is at peace.
What more could we want?
For the present we shall embrace the world
For the future we shall become one with the flow of heaven and earth.

1. THE TANGGU TRUCE

Emperor's concerns about Operation Rehe

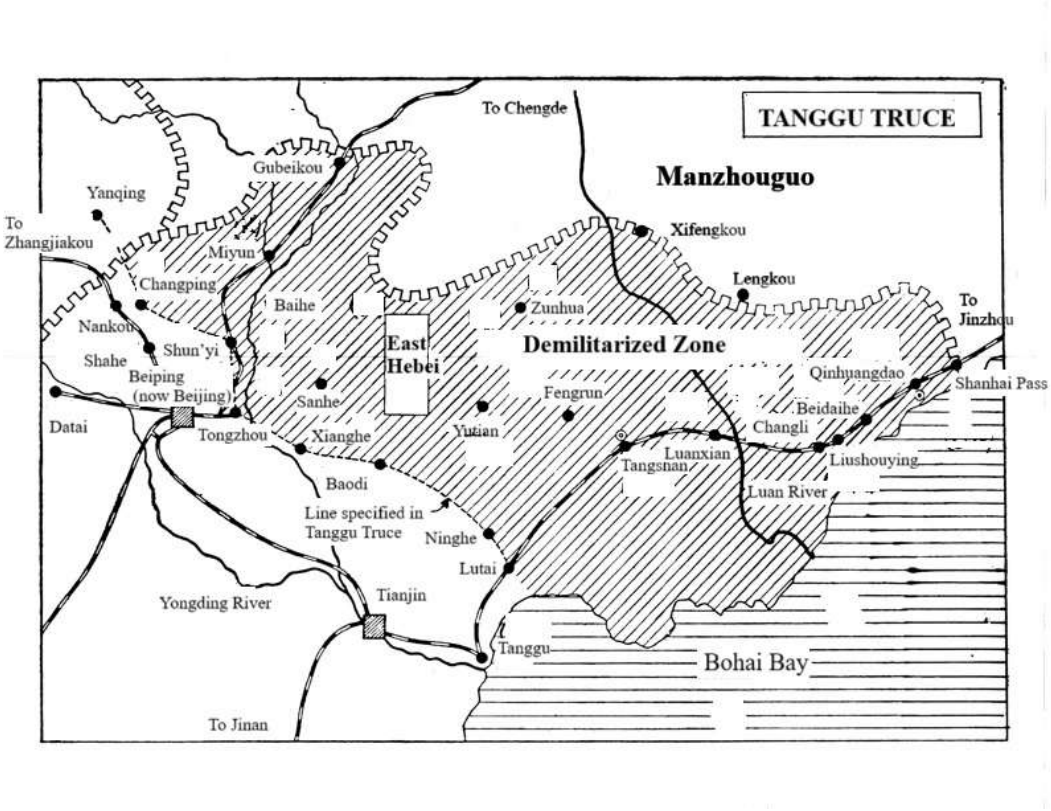
The path leading from the Manchurian Incident to the 2nd Sino-Japanese War was anything but straightforward. Beginning with this chapter, I shall describe the Lugou Bridge Incident, which triggered the war, placing it in the proper historical context. To accomplish that task, it will be necessary to return to a period several years prior to the Manchurian Incident. To shed light on the situation at that time, it is essential to provide an overview of developments in Japan-China relations, particularly those that concern North China, as well as the communist movement in China.

Manzhouguo was established in March 1932. But in the ensuing years, bandits continued to run rampant in the region — more than 200,000 of them. The Japanese Guandong Army launched punitive expeditions against them, and as a result, by February 1933 most of the bandits had been expelled or eliminated.

Meanwhile Zhang Xueliang, who had been driven out of Manchuria, managed to form a volunteer army 40,000 men strong. He proceeded to invade Rehe province, where he organized a base of operations for anti-Manzhouguo and anti-Japanese activity. It was there, in the beginning of February 1933, that the Guandong Army launched Operation Rehe, whose objective was to expel Zhang's forces, which were the main cause of turmoil in Manzhouguo. The Japanese speedily routed the Chinese, and, by early March, had taken control of the Great Wall's key passes. The Nationalist government's finance minister, T.V. Soong, expressed his surprise at the relentless Japanese advance by quoting a Chinese classic: "Train an army for a thousand days to use it for one morning." Japanese soldiers were given strict orders not to cross to the Chinese side of the Great Wall during Operation Rehe. Furthermore, Commander Mutō Nobuyoshi issued the following secret directive on February 19, which strictly forbade his men from venturing south of the Great Wall.

> "The operation at hand concerns Manzhouguo and only Manzhouguo. Provoking war with China is contrary to national policy. … Rehe province is Manzhouguo territory. Within its borders our forces may act at their discretion. However, Hebei province, situated beyond the Great Wall, is Republic of China territory. We may not take operational action in Hebei in the absence of imperial orders. We must be vigilant and avoid being distracted by changes in local circumstances or by strategic advantages. We must make every possible effort to avoid losing sight of the broad perspective and acting in a way that is contrary to national policy, even when under extreme provocation. The garrison in the vicinity of the Shanhai Pass area must be especially vigilant, taking care not to exceed established boundaries. Having heard the concerns of His Majesty, the Supreme Commander, I humbly issue these instructions."[1]

[1]



Obviously, the commander in chief of the Guandong Army had been thoroughly briefed about Emperor Showa's concerns. Accordingly, he prohibited his men from advancing beyond the Great Wall into China proper.

The instructions he received clearly communicate the Emperor's desire to avoid war with China, as well as the commander's own genuine wish to avoid overstepping the bounds of his orders. But the cruelty of history is such that Japan's goodwill and peaceful intentions alone could not prevent the outbreak of war.

Circumstances compel Japanese to cross Great Wall

In mid-March, the Nationalist government dismissed Zhang Xueliang and, in his stead, appointed He Yingqin as head of the Beiping Branch of the Military Affairs Commission. It then ordered the 50,000-man Central Army, to advance northwards. Until the end of April, the Guandong Army was struggling in the face of a fierce Chinese Central Army counteroffensive at every major pass along the Great Wall. The Japanese were experiencing such difficulties in part because the Chinese had the advantage of being able to look down on them from the Great Wall. To gain the advantage, the Japanese had only one strategic option: advance, at least to some extent, south of the Great Wall. Thus, Operation Rehe and Operation Great Wall Line compelled the Japanese to move beyond the Great Wall, whether they wished to or not.

Once the Japanese had occupied key passes, the 20-division Central Army, realizing that the Japanese would stop short of the Great Wall, assembled in the Pingjin area and made repeated attempts to recapture the positions they had lost. For instance, at Lengkou Pass (to the north of the

Jianchang barracks), the Chinese penetrated deeply into Rehe province with as many as 7,000 men. At that point, the Japanese had no choice but to cross the Great Wall. In mid-April, they broke through it at Lengkou Pass and Xifengkou, and pursued the Chinese toward the Luan River. Thus, the determination of the Guandong Army officials notwithstanding, the Japanese were provoked into expanding their theater to include the interior of the passes.

Then suddenly, on April 19, during the surging Japanese advance, an order to withdraw north of the Great Wall was issued, and all units immediately returned to Rehe province. According to a journal kept by Chief Aide-de-Camp Honjō Shigeru and other sources, on April 18 Emperor Showa, concerned about the Guandong Army's moving south of the Great Wall, spoke to Honjō: "Why not order the Guandong Army to halt its advance?" When Honjō conveyed His Majesty's wishes to Deputy Chief of Staff Masaki Jinzaburō, who was so deeply affected that he not only had a personal letter in which he described the Emperor's wishes delivered to the Guandong Army commander in chief, but also wired the Guandong Army chief of staff, ordering him to withdraw his troops immediately. That was the order for the Japanese to move away from the Great Wall, interrupting the hostilities, as described above.[2]

Chinese provoke Japanese into crossing Great Wall

Unfortunately, the Chinese did not discern the desire on the part of Japanese troops to make peace. After suffering a punishing attack in the area east of the Luan River, the Chinese retreated to the right bank of that river. When the Japanese withdrew to an area north of the Great Wall, the Chinese pursued them and again challenged them in the area east of the Luan River. If after withdrawing, the Japanese allowed the Chinese to continue with their provocative behavior, there would never be peace on the Manchurian-Chinese border. Chief of Staff Koiso Kuniaki, who had traveled to Tokyo, received permission from His Majesty and Army authorities to advance, once again, to the area east of the Luan River. On May 7 the Guandong Army initiated multiple offensives against Chinese units that were now in the area east of the Luan River. On the following day the Japanese commanding officer issued a statement placing the responsibility for the hostilities on the behavior of the Chinese — the contemptuous stance they had adopted when they realized that the Japanese would not advance beyond the Great Wall. Now the Japanese offensive beyond the Great Wall began in earnest. The Japanese crossed the Luan River and pursued the Chinese with accelerating momentum. Japanese forces from Gubeikou also advanced beyond the Great Wall, throwing the Pingjin region into a state of acute panic. By May 23, Beiping (Beijing) was within striking distance. At this juncture the Chinese were helpless. On May 25 He Yingqin dispatched an emissary to Miyun with a formal ceasefire proposal. The Guandong Army halted combat operations. The operation conducted south of the Great Wall had come to an end.

[2] Honjō Shigeru, "Shihishō," (Selections from private memoirs) *Honjō nikki* (Honjō diary) (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1967).

Conclusion of ceasefire agreement

On May 31, 1933 Maj.-Gen. Okumura Yasuji, Guandong Army deputy chief of staff, and Lt.-Gen. Xiong Bin, chief of staff, Beiping Branch Military Council signed a ceasefire agreement at Tanggu, commonly referred to as the Tanggu Truce. Its essential points follow:

1. The Chinese army shall immediately withdraw to the regions west and south of the line from Yenching [Yanqing] to … Tungchow [Tongzhou] … and Lutai, and undertakes not to advance beyond that line, and to avoid any provocation of hostilities.
2. [Omitted]
3. The Japanese army, after ascertaining the withdrawal of the Chinese army to the line stated in Article 1, undertakes not to cross the said line and not to continue to attack the Chinese troops, and shall voluntarily withdraw, in general, to the Great Wall.
4. In the regions to the south of the Great Wall and to the north and east of the line defined in Article 1, the maintenance of peace and order shall be undertaken by the Chinese police force. The said police force shall not be constituted of armed units hostile to Japanese feelings.
5. [Omitted][3]

By the beginning of August Japanese troops had, for the most part, returned to their positions north of the Great Wall.

The Tanggu Truce specified that a demilitarized zone would be established in the northeast corner of Hebei province. In 1935, when the Umezu-He Agreement was signed, the zone was expanded to include all of Hebei province, and it was under these circumstances that the Guandong Army's plan to divide and conquer North China moved forward.

> In short, the conclusion of the T'angku Truce marked the first step of the Japanese army into North China.[4]

There is nothing surprising about this opinion, found in the *China Quagmire*, a study published by the Japan Association of International Relations. Still, we must not forget that it was the hateful, provocative stance adopted by the Chinese that drove the Guandong Army to expand its Rehe operation south of the Great Wall.

Legacy of the Tanggu Truce

As one might expect, the Tanggu Truce clearly delineated the border between Manchuria and China and provided, to some extent, a resolution of the Manchurian Incident. Why, then, did it

[3] James William Morley, ed., *The China Quagmire: Japan's Expansion on the Asian Continent 1933-1941* (selected translations from Nihon Kokusai Seiji Gakkai (Japan Association of International Relations), *Taiheiyō sensō e no michi: kaisen gaikō shi, daisankan* (Japan's road to the Pacific War: diplomatic history, vol. 3) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 59-60.

[4] *Ibid*., 59.

not put a complete end to disputes between Japan and China? Why did disputes in the demilitarized zone specified in the treaty arise between the two nations, and soon culminate in the 2nd Sino-Japanese War?

This is a sensitive question. When it was posed to Gen. Ishiwara Kanji after the Greater East Asian War had ended, his reply was, "The Tanggu Truce was a success in that it offered a local resolution to the conflict between Japan and China. However, it should have gone further, including provisions for diplomatic negotiations resulting in a promise (even a tacit one) from Chiang Kai-shek to put a halt to anti-Japanese activity, initiate Japan-China joint efforts to combat communism, and recognize Manzhouguo. The slipshod efforts on the part of the leadership were certainly a primary cause of the ensuing war." [5] In 1940 Maj.-Gen. Kawabe Torashirō, head of the War Leadership Council (later promoted to colonel), also commented on the treaty as follows: "There is more than one explanation for the outbreak of the 2nd Sino-Japanese War. But ultimately, it comes down to the fact that there was no political resolution of the Manchurian Incident." Kawabe described the Tanggu Truce as "a stopgap ceasefire pact between the north China branch of the Nationalist government's Military Affairs Commission and the Guandong Army."

It is certainly true that, prior to the conclusion of the treaty, the Japanese had the upper hand, being within striking distance and poised to gain control of Beiping as they were. Therefore, the drafting of the treaty would have presented an ideal opportunity not only to conclude a ceasefire agreement, but also to reach a political settlement, which would include the recognition of Manzhouguo. But the Guandong Army was satisfied with having obtained a treaty that gave *de facto* recognition of Manzhouguo's borders. It is easy, in hindsight, to be critical about unresolved problems. Nevertheless, a fair evaluation of the situation cannot be made without considering the circumstances that compelled the Guandong Army to end its operations south of the Great Wall early and decide upon a ceasefire. Among them were its grossly inferior military strength compared with the Chinese forces, and the concerns of the Emperor and military authorities about advancing south of the Great Wall.

[5] Tsunoda Jun, *Ishiwara Kanji shiryō* (Documents pertaining to Ishiwara Kanji) (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1967).

2. JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS IMPROVE

Foreign Minister Hirota's promise: "non-aggression"

There was a time when some aspects of the Japan-China relationship improved markedly. Credit for that development belongs to Hirota Kōki, the one and only civil servant sent to the gallows by the IMTFE.

Hirota joined Prime Minister Saitō Makoto's Cabinet as foreign minister in September 1933, and remained in that position when Saitō was succeeded by Okada Keisuke in July 1934. On January 22, 1935, by which time Japan-China relations were finally approaching a state resembling normality, Hirota delivered an address before the Diet in which he announced that Japan's foreign policy would "embody the principles of non-aggression and non-menace."[1] The speech created a stir both at home and abroad. On January 26 Hirota spoke again, at the Lower House of the Diet: "I am confident that there will be no war while I am in office."[2] His words elicited a prodigious response from the halls of the Chinese government in Nanjing. In fact, Chiang Kai-shek lauded Hirota's speeches, saying that they provided an unparalleled impetus for the amelioration of relations between the two countries.

At a press conference on February 1, Chiang announced his guidelines for improving relations between China and Japan: "I sense the sincerity in Foreign Minister Hirota's addresses to the Diet. If we can dispel our past hostility toward Japan, and temper Japan's supercilious attitude toward China, I believe we can become good neighbors. If my compatriots behave fairly, intelligently, and ethically — if they suppress their baser impulses and refrain from anti-Japanese activity, I am certain that the Japanese will respond by acting in good faith."

On February 22 in Nanjing, Wang Jingwei, president of the Executive Yuan, spoke of the need to promote friendship with Japan because of its close geographic, historical, cultural, and ethnic connections with China. He added that the speech delivered by Sun Yat-sen in Kobe in 1924, which advocated a partnership between China and Japan (Pan-Asianism) formed the foundation for diplomacy between the two nations, and that Hirota's speeches were consistent with long-established Chinese priorities. Chiang Kai-shek, then in Hankou attempting to suppress the communists, heard of Wang's address and sent him a telegram in which he expressed his approval and promised his cooperation.

The Chinese did not stop with that declaration. Without prompting, they took steps toward eradicating anti-Japanese activity. On February 20 the Nationalist government ordered all newspapers and other media outlets in China to cease carrying anti-Japanese editorials. On February 28 Shao Yuanchong was dismissed from his position as Central Propaganda Department head (Shao had been overseeing the publication of anti-Japanese tracts). Moreover, the Nationalist

[1] "Hirota's Speech on Foreign Relations," *New York Times*, 22 January 1935, 3; https://www.nytimes.com/1935/01/22/archives/hirotas-speech-on-foreign-relations.html.

[2] Hugh Byas, "Japanese Public Is Passive," *New York Times*, 26 January 1935, 10; https://www.nytimes.com/1935/01/26/archives/japanese-public-is-passive.html.

government made a genuine effort to emend anti-Japanese accounts in textbooks. On March 15, the Ministry of Education issued instructions to all municipal directors of education, prohibiting them from using textbooks not approved by the government.

Many unresolved problems remained in the Japan-China relationship, but the Hirota speeches provided momentum for the betterment of relations between the two countries, and genuine, if gradual, efforts were made to improve diplomatic relations.

Japanese legation upgraded to embassy

In May 1935, when the fortunes of the Japan-China friendship were at an all-time high, Foreign Minister Hirota, having obtained Cabinet approval, made the decision to upgrade the Japanese legation to embassy status. He then appointed then Minister to China Ariyoshi Akira as Japan's first ambassador to China. When Wang Jingwei received a notification of this development, he was overjoyed: "Now the two nations will be able to walk hand in hand down the great path of East Asia." He then immediately promised to initiate a similar improvement on the Chinese side.

Apparently, when the UK, US, and Germany learned about Japan's decision, they felt that they had been blindsided. That was hardly the intention of the Japanese, who suggested that all the relevant Powers make the same upgrades. The most hesitant among them were the British, who insisted that their elevation be announced at the same time as Japan's. The Japanese agreed, and on May 17, 1935 Japan, China, and the UK issued a simultaneous announcement. Some historians argue that the exchange of ambassadors is purely a perfunctory, ceremonial procedure, and that there was no guarantee that it would resolve all the problems between Japan and China. They cannot bring themselves to commend Hirota for taking the initiative. Nevertheless, that upgrade was, without a doubt, a demonstration of respect for China. It is an accepted truth that mutual respect has been, and continues to be, an important factor in promoting friendship between nations. In that light, it makes sense to simply appreciate the elevation as a clear indication of Hirota's friendly stance toward China.

3. UMEZU-HE AGREEMENT

China's hypocritical policy

It seemed that in North China, relations among Japan, Manzhouguo, and China were becoming less fraught after the Tanggu Truce was signed. Unfortunately, the reality was quite different. Though the Chinese were feigning friendliness toward the Japanese, they were secretly engaging in terrorist activity targeting the Japanese and Manzhouguo. At the center of the anti-Japanese, anti-Manzhouguo movement were Hebei Governor Yu Xuezhong (a former northeastern warlord), GMD Central Headquarters personnel, the Central Army, and the Blue Shirt Society (the GMD's secret special operations agency whose chief function was terrorism). These individuals and organizations had gone underground, capitalizing on the fact that North China had been relatively quiet since the ceasefire agreement. Therefore, they largely escaped the notice of the Guandong Army and the Tianjin Garrison. But in 1935, their activity became more blatant.

The GMD's oversight was partially successful in controlling anti-Japanese activity. However, the results of a Japanese Army study revealed that between January and May of 1935, when Japan-China relations seemed to be improving, there were more than 50 instances of major and minor anti-Japanese and anti-Manzhouguo offenses. The most notable cases were the assassinations of Chinese company presidents who were sympathetic to Japan.

1. Umezu-He Treaty concluded

The Guandong Army and the Tianjin Garrison deeply resented China's hypocritical policy. They were painfully aware that it needed to be rectified, but before they had devised a full-fledged plan, a serious incident arose. At the time there were two Chinese-language newspapers in Tianjin that had historically been pro-Japanese: *National Rights*, and the *Tientsin Morning Post*[1] Between May 2 and 3, the presidents of both newspaper companies were murdered by assassins armed with pistols. A thorough investigation conducted by the Tianjin Garrison revealed that the Beiping branch of the Military Affairs Commission, the Blue Shirt Society, and the GMD had all been involved in the assassinations. It also came to light that the plot had been orchestrated by Yang Hu, who headed both the Shanghai Defense Commission and the Blue Shirt Society's Central Executive Committee. After the crime was committed, Hu went into hiding in the French Concession in Shanghai.

At that point China Garrison Chief of Staff Sakai Takashi and Maj. Takahashi Tan, military attaché to the Japanese Legation in Beiping, representing both the Guandong Army and the China Garrison, met with He Yingqin, head of the Beiping Branch of the Military Affairs Commission. The Japanese representatives told He that anti-Manzhouguo plots and anti-Japanese acts of terrorism carried out by the North China branch of the Nationalist government's Military Affairs

[1] Ling Chen-Ping, ed., *China Publishers' Directory* (Shanghai: China Commercial Advertising Agency, 1934), 22.

Commission constituted violations of the Tanggu Truce. They then presented the following demands.

(1) Chiang Kai-shek must abandon his hypocritical policy.
(2) The organizations committing acts of terrorism, namely the 3rd Regiment of the Military Police, the Military Affairs Commission's Political Indoctrination Department, Nationalist Party bureaus, and the Blue Shirt Society must withdraw from North China.
(3) The 3rd and 25th divisions, which provide support for the organizations listed in (2), must withdraw from North China.
(4) Hu Xuezhong, governor of Hebei province, must be dismissed.

Acts of provocation from the Chinese military against the Tianjin Garrison continued, but Japanese Army officials continued to caution their units against using military force against local Chinese troops. Finally, the Nationalist finally telegraphed the following notification to He Yingqin, who communicated its content to Maj. Takahashi on June 10:

(1) Nationalist Party bureaus shall withdraw from Hebei province.
(2) Central Army units shall withdraw from Hebei province.
(3) Order prohibiting anti-Japanese activity throughout China shall be issued.

In addition to (3), the Chinese reported the issuance of the Directive for the Promotion of Amicable Relations (also on June 10), as well as an order forbidding anti-Japanese activity, and promised that perpetrators thereof would be severely punished. The Chinese had acquiesced to all of the Japanese demands. Still, when the Tianjin Garrison pressed He Yingqin for the Chinese response in writing, He suddenly left Hebei for points south. Later both Japanese Army and Foreign Ministry officials again asked the Chinese to submit their answers in the form of a memorandum. Finally, on July 9, a notification addressed to Maj.-Gen. Umezu Yoshijirō, commander of the China Garrison Army and signed by He, was delivered to the Tianjin Garrison. It read, "All requests from Chief of Staff Sakai have been approved; I shall ensure that they are implemented."

That notification became the Umezu-He Agreement. The incident was thereby resolved, and Chinese anti-Japanese organizations and Central Army units withdrew from Hebei province.

Doihara-Qin Agreement concluded

Song Zheyuan, commander of the 29th Army, was a former subordinate of Qin Dechun. His base of operations was Zhangjiakou in Chahar province. After the Tanggu Truce was signed, Song became increasingly anti-Japanese. From the last half of 1934 through 1935, Song created problem after problem for the Japanese. Among them were the 1st Zhangbei Incident, the 1st Western Rehe Incident, the 2nd Zhangbei Incident, and the Dongzhaizi Incident (2nd Western Rehe Incident). These were all armed provocations against Japan, and in every case Song's forces were involved.

Taking a serious view of the frequent inflammatory acts perpetrated by Song's forces, the Guandong Army wired Maj.-Gen. Doihara Kenji, head of the Fengtian Special Agency, who happened to be in Beiping, requesting that he demand the withdrawal of Song Zheyuan's forces south of the Yellow River. However, central Army authorities disagreed with the Guandong

Army's hard-line position. The Army General Staff Office wired a message to the Guandong Army stating, "we find your uncompromising position unwise. Negotiations should be conducted in as fair a manner as possible." Army authorities viewed North China problems with extreme caution and tried mightily to handle them equitably.

The Guandong Army eventually came to accept central Army authorities' temperate policy. On their part, the Chinese, of their own accord, needing to find a speedy resolution, relieved Song Zheyuan of his positions as governor of Chahar province and commander of the 29th Army. They also appointed Qin Dechun, then commissioner of civil affairs, as acting provincial governor. The Guandong Army also softened its requirements for resolution, for instance, by cancelling its demand for the withdrawal of Song's army south of the Yellow River. Maj.-Gen. Doihara presented the revised Japanese demands to Song Zheyuan. On June 27 Qin Dechun responded in writing that the Chinese would accept all of Japan's demands, including removing anti-Japanese organizations and the Song army from Chahar province. That missive served as the basis for the Doihara-Qin Agreement. As a result, Song Zheyuan's 29th Army moved out of Chahar, regrouping in the Beiping area. But who could have known that the 29th Army had already been infiltrated by a great many anti-Japanese elements, most of them CCP members, and that two years later it would cause the Lugou Bridge Incident?

Chinese violations of the Tanggu Trace led to the conclusion of the Umezu-He Agreement. Similarly, Chinese armed provocations against the Japanese led to the signing of the Doihara-Qin Agreement. It was, indisputably, Chinese actions that made both agreements necessary. Ultimately, a pro-Japanese government was established in North China, but this development was the inevitable consequence of the two agreements.

4. NEGOTIATIONS OVER FOREIGN MINISTER HIROTA'S THREE PRINCIPLES

Both Japan and China submit proposals

In 1935, Foreign Minister Hirota's Japan-China Friendship efforts reached a peak with the exchanging of ambassadors. Provocative Chinese activity in Hebei and Chahar provinces did put a damper on that groundswell of amity, but Japan's determination to further improve ties between the two nations never wavered, and culminated in the proposal of Hirota's Three Principles. They were a counterproposal to China's three principles, which the Chinese had cannily submitted, taking the initiative, as if to conceal their incendiary anti-Japanese activity.

China's three principles, which Ambassador Jiang Zuobin conveyed to Foreign Minister Hirota in early September, after consulting with Chiang Kai-shek, were as follows:

1. Each nation shall respect the other's independence.
2. Each nation shall support genuine friendship with the other.
3. Disputes between the two nations, without exception, shall be resolved by peaceful, diplomatic means.

Ambassador Jiang expressed his hope that if adherence to the principles submitted by the Chinese resulted in the two nations' becoming true friends, both the Umezu-He and Doihara-Qin agreements could be annulled, as they would no longer be needed. Jiang explained that Chiang Kai-shek could not recognize Manzhouguo's independence, but neither would he lodge a protest in that connection at that time. He added that Chiang would not insist that Japan revoke its recognition of Manzhouguo, and was prepared to discuss military cooperation toward the achievement of further "common objectives" if attempts to improve Sino-Japanese relations bore fruit.

When the Lugou Bridge Incident erupted two years later, Hirota's Three Principles as well as the Chinese aims were incorporated, almost in their entirety, into the ceasefire negotiations and a diplomatic adjustment plan (most commonly known as the Funatsu Initiative). However, Funatsu's efforts collapsed when Lt. Ōyama Isao was murdered (to be discussed later).

As for Japan's response, even before the Chinese came forth with their three principles, Foreign Minister Hirota was attempting to capitalize on the increasing momentum toward amicable relations between Japan and China. He instructed the head of his Secretariat to ask Army and Navy officials to draw up policy proposals designed to adjust diplomatic relations with China. On October 4, after much discussion and cross-checking, Hirota's Three Principles were approved.

Prefaced by a statement to the effect that the objectives of Japan's foreign policy were stability in, and the advancement, of East Asia, to be achieved through the collaboration of Japan, Manzhouguo, and China, the three principles were:

1. Eradication of anti-Japanese activity, be it word or deed (the Chinese shall eliminate all types of anti-Japanese activity and abandon their habit of pitting other Powers against Japan)

2. Tacit recognition of Manzhouguo (the Chinese shall acknowledge the independence of Manzhouguo and revoke their anti-Manzhouguo policies)
3. Collaboration to prevent the encroachment of communism (since communizing forces from Outer Mongolia are a common threat to all three nations, the Chinese shall cooperate with Japan to prevent the encroachment of communism into areas adjacent to Outer Mongolia)

The plan was that once there was evidence that the Chinese were prepared to address these principles in earnest, a new relationship could be forged among Japan, China, and Manzhouguo.

On October 7 Foreign Minister Hirota's Three Principles were communicated to Ambassador Jiang. Toward the end of that month, the Chinese replied as follows:

1. China has no intention of pitting one Power against another, nor shall she engage in anti-Japanese activity.
2. Government-level negotiations between China and Manzhouguo are not possible, but China has no intention of altering the status quo in Manzhouguo by anything other than peaceful means.
3. If Japan fully implements China's three principles, China will endeavor to cooperate on finding methods of joint defense against communism in areas adjacent to Outer Mongolia, provided that doing so does not undermine Chinese sovereignty or independence.

Negotiations reach a standstill

Foreign Minister Hirota reacted to the Chinese assertion that "once China fully implements Japan's Three Principles, we will discuss joint defense against communism in the northern border area," by saying, "If that is the case, we may never see a solution."

Japan and China continued to hold negotiations relating to this situation. But the Japanese saw China's insistence on equality in relations between the two nations as a stumbling block. The Chinese were demanding the abrogation of all unequal treaties, as well as the abolition of foreign concessions and settlements, and consular jurisdiction. The Japanese position on this matter was that the Guandong Leased Territory, Japan's sole concession on the Asian Continent, was leased from Manzhouguo and had no connection with China. Hirota had no objection to equality between Japan and China. Still, China's emphasis on equal rights might be interpreted as a recurrence of its revolutionary diplomacy of the past. In that case, it would be nearly impossible for the Chinese to accept Hirota's Three Principles. It seemed as though negotiations had reached an impasse before they began.

Moreover, the pro-Japanese efforts made by Wang Jingwei and others fueled opposition to Wang, and on November 1, 1935, during the 6th Plenary Session of the Guomindang's Fourth Central Executive Committee, he was shot and seriously injured. The Chinese informed Japan that the attack was perpetrated by leftists. When surgeons were unable to remove the bullet after several operations, Wang resigned from his positions as president of the Executive Yuan and foreign minister. Chiang Kai-shek appointed himself president of the Executive Yuan, and appointed Zhang Qun foreign minister. The Chiang-Wang coalition had come to an end. Against this

background of changes in Chinese leadership and the continuing negotiations between Japan and China over developments in the North China autonomy movement, Hirota's Three Principles slowly lost their relevance.

5. NORTH CHINA AUTONOMY MOVEMENT; HEBEI AND CHAHAR AUTONOMOUS GOVERNMENTS

Emergence of North China autonomy movements

After the Tanggu Truce was concluded, the inhabitants of North China were not altogether satisfied with life under the rule of the Nanjing Nationalist government. Farmers in the Demilitarized Zone harbored a fervent desire for North China autonomy, and hoped an opportunity would arise.

What motivated them was frustration with the Nanjing government's predatory tax policy vis à vis North China over the preceding decade. Here is one example: In 1935 the government collected 14,000 yuan *per annum* in central government tax and non-tax revenue. Since the central government expended only 8,350 yuan on North China, it was pocketing 5,650 yuan!

Exploitative policies like this had been commonly used by Chinese warlords in the past. But as Chiang Kai-shek's regime gradually retrenched in the face of Manzhouguo's remarkable progress, it was only natural that a deep-seated longing for autonomy would spring up among the people of North China.

Accordingly, the basis for the formation of an autonomy movement was deep-rooted. It is not surprising that a strong desire on the part of the people of North China to rebel against persistent misgovernment and escape from their predicament inspired them to turn to Japan and Manzhouguo.

But this groundswell should certainly not be attributed to local machinations of the Japanese military. Support from the Japanese military alone would not have been sufficient to give rise to an autonomy movement among the Chinese people. What was needed was a change of heart among them, impoverished as they were by so many years of warlord "governance." The evolution of the autonomy movement and the background for Manchurian independence were interrelated.

With the conclusion of the Umezu-He Agreement, the North China autonomy movement erupted in a violent manner, with the Fengtai revolt and the Xianghe peasant uprising. The Fengtai revolt was an attempt by Bai Jianwu to take advantage of the signing of the Umezu-He pact to occupy Beiping with his own troops, goad anti-Chiang factions to rise to action, and establish a pro-Japanese, pro-Manzhouguo government. The plan ended when Bai's troops were defeated in a confrontation in Beiping on June 28. When it came to light that several Japanese nationals, including the chairman of the North China Youth League, were involved in the incident, the consul-general at Tianjin ordered them to leave China; he also ordered the North China Youth League to disband. This was a public gesture demonstrating that Japan did not support the North China autonomy movement.

The Xianghe Incident was an autonomy movement started by farmers in October 1935 in Xianghe county, Hebei province, along the border of the Demilitarized Zone (designated by the Tanggu Truce). A group of approximately 1,000 peasants banded together to present a petition for autonomy. They repudiated both Chiang Kai-shek's government and the GMD, pressed for the elimination of extortionist taxes, and demanded local autonomy and the resignation of the county magistrate. County officials attempted to use force to suppress the petitioners. However, the

realization that they could not succeed convinced the officials to compromise with the petitioners by issuing a tax-reduction order. The uprising eventually subsided. An investigation conducted by the Japanese military police revealed that several Japanese had participated in the uprising. However, no official Japanese entities were involved. The incident was a timely emergence of deep-rooted political discontent in North China, which might be described as a major trend that makes the involvement of a few Japanese seem insignificant.

North China's warlords vacillate

As the notion of political autonomy for North China began to surface, so did unrest among North China's warlords, mainly Yan Xishan of Shanxi, Han Fuju of Shandong, Shang Zhen and Wan Fulin of Hebei, and Song Zheyuan, who had gradually moved into Hebei from Chahar province. All were aware of the need for an alliance with Japan. But they were also apprehensive about pressure from Nanjing, and refrained from acting precipitously. The Nanjing government responded to the turmoil in North China by using a combination of inflexible and accommodating tactics, flaunting its military might at times and seeming conciliatory at others, to prevent defections and undermine efforts toward North China autonomy.

In November of 1935 the Nationalist government initiated a currency reform with British backing. If the reform were successful, Nanjing's control over North China would certainly tighten, and British influence would increase. Japanese Army authorities were not amenable to British domination over North China. The warlords were also unhappy about the possibility of the Chiang government's wrapping its tentacles around North China. The interests of local Japanese forces and the warlords coincided on this point.

Immediately after the currency reform was implemented, both Song and Han attempted to sabotage it by prohibiting the export of silver from their provinces. Song then sent a telegram to the Fifth Guomindang Congress demanding the formation of a constitutional government, the convening of a national assembly, and the return of power to the people. Some historians argue that these actions were the result of "coercion" by the Japanese military. They were not, but even if they had been, we must not forget that the warlords welcomed and used that same "coercion" as an excuse to abandon the Nanjing Nationalist government and achieve autonomy for North China.

At the time, the Song faction's plan involved (1) forming a pro-Japanese, anti-Soviet autonomous (semi-independent) government in North China, (2) having that government comprise five provinces and three cities, and (3) recognizing the suzerainty of the Nanjing government, but retaining a high degree of freedom over foreign and domestic affairs and economic matters. In the meantime, Song secretly complained to Nanjing about the untenable position he found himself in due to "oppression and coercion" from the Japanese. He found himself struggling to protect his position by sitting on both sides of the fence. On the one hand, Song promised the Japanese that he would establish autonomy and declare independence for North China. On the other, he secretly swore loyalty to the Nanjing government. His hypocritical schemes caused confusion in North China.

For that reason, North China autonomy was assuredly not a high-handed demand from Japan. Rather, it was a movement created by the aspirations of the North China warlords.

Establishment of East Hebei Autonomous Government; Hebei-Chahar Political Council

The North China autonomy movement was in turmoil in November 1935, thanks to the Nanjing government's attempts to undermine it, and vacillation on the part of the warlords. Then, in Tongzhou on November 25 Yin Rugeng, commissioner of the Demilitarized Zone, suddenly issued a declaration of autonomy for the zone and announced the establishment of the East Hebei Anti-Communist Autonomous Council. In addition to castigating the central government, Yin's declaration stated, "In response to the desires of the four million residents of the Demilitarized Zone, we have risen up to save ourselves. We vow that henceforth we shall abandon the central government, proclaim autonomy, serve as the harbingers of autonomy for other provinces, and strive for peace in Asia."[1]

Yin became chairman of the council, which had nine members. The autonomous region comprised 25 counties, seven more than the 18 designated in the Tanggu Truce.

The East Hebei Anti-Communist Autonomous Council's declaration infuriated the Nanjing government, which denounced Yin as a traitor and issued an order for his arrest.

In the meantime, demonstrations in Tianjin and Beiping, which involved both anti- and pro-autonomy groups, created chaos. Finally, the Nanjing government decided that, given the circumstances, it would be preferable to anticipate the Japanese by establishing a political organization suited to North China, one that would allow the central government to salvage its reputation. On December 18 the Hebei-Chahar Political Council was born. The council would have jurisdiction over all government affairs for two provinces (Hebei and Chahar) and two cities (Beiping and Tianjin). When Song Zheyuan was installed as chairman, he said that politics should respect the will of the people and be guided by integrity. He promised that, taking the special situation in North China into consideration, he would strive to maintain peace in East Asia, with friendship between China and Japan as the starting point. Song also pledged that he would endeavor to resist the scourge of communism and nurture the people's ability to govern themselves.

That was the process that resulted in the formation of the East Hebei Anti-Communist Autonomy Council and the Hebei-Chahar Political Council toward the end of 1935. However, while the former stressed independence from the Nanjing government and was pro-Japanese, the latter was rooted in compromise between Japan and China. Song Zheyuan was handpicked by the Japanese, but the Hebei-Chahar Political Council[2] was an organ of the Nationalist government. Due to its duplicity, the Hebei-Chahar Political Council was doomed from the start.

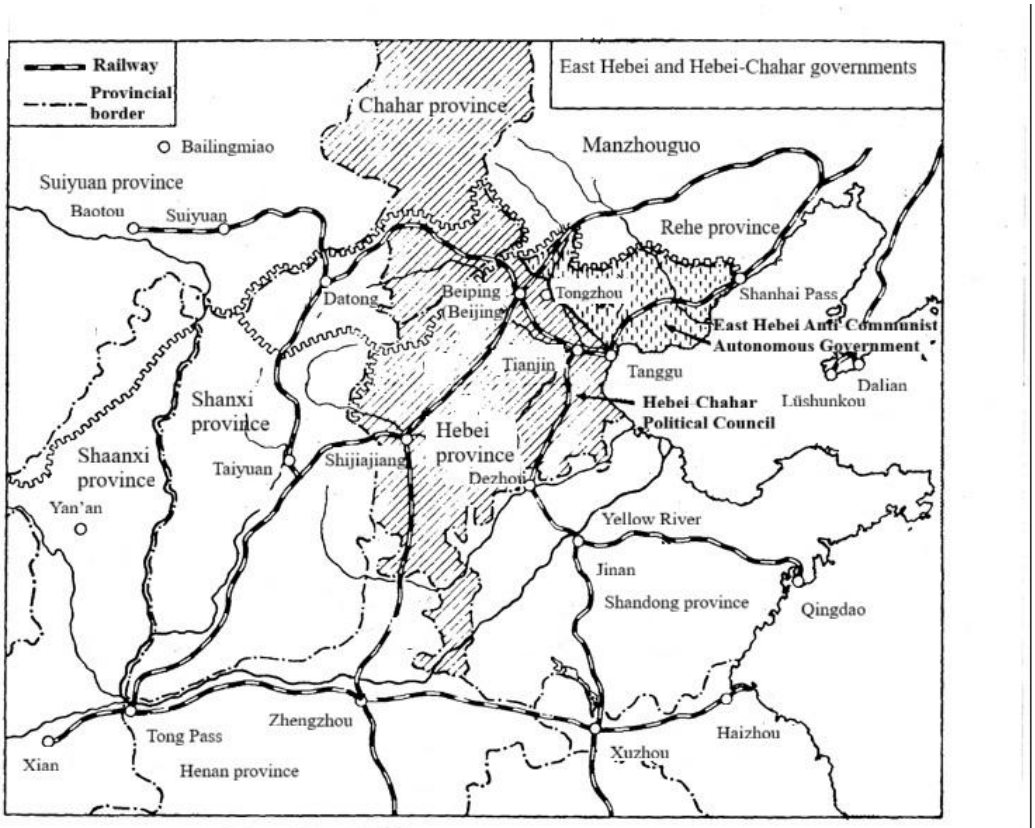
Unsurprisingly, relations between the two councils were less than smooth. The East Hebei organization had intended to merge with the Hebei-Chahar group when the time was right. But when it became clear that the Hebei-Chahar group was controlled by the Nanjing government, that

[1] 冀东防共自治委员会, *冀东防共自治委员会成立宣言*, 25 November 1935, transcription at Wikisource, https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/冀东防共自治委员会成立宣言; retrieved 09/2025.

[2] According to a contemporaneous Nationalist government organization chart, the Hebei-Chahar Political Council was answerable to the Executive Yuan.

plan was abandoned. On November 25, the East Hebei organization changed its name to the East Hebei Anti-Communist Autonomous Government, with Yin Rugeng as its chief.

In late November, when the UK and US asked the Japanese for an explanation of the situation in North China, Shigemitsu Mamoru, vice-minister for foreign affairs, acknowledged that the Japanese military had had some involvement in recent events, but because of China's hostility toward Manzhouguo, that was unavoidable. His counterargument to the UK was that the currency reform had aggravated problems in North China, and had once again brought on a worsening of relations between Japan and China. In any case, the rivalry between the two North China governments continued, a reflection of the complex political and economic situation in North China.



Republic of China

CHAPTER 12: CHINESE CIVIL WAR AND THE XI'AN INCIDENT

1. CHIANG KAI-SHEK'S PHILOSOPHY AND POLICIES

GMD-CCP split and the anti-communist campaigns

I shall now backtrack a bit, to the rift between the GMD and the CCP. Even after the First United Front came into being in 1924, friction between the two parties persisted. Finally, in 1927, when the CCP's plot to foment violent revolution against the GMD came to light during the Northern Expedition, the alliance between the GMD and the CCP was dissolved, and the leaders of the CCP scattered. At that time Mao Zedong was in seclusion at Jinggangshan on the border between Hunan and Jiangxi provinces, where he devoted himself to developing a communist army. Warlord Zhu De eventually joined forces with Mao who, together with Zhu and his army, entered Jianxi province, where they gradually expanded their power base. By the beginning of 1933, the Red Army boasted four corps comprising 200,000 men.

At the end of 1930 Chiang Kai-shek initiated his first and second sweeps (campaigns intended to eradicate communist forces), and launched a third the following year. In September Chiang prepared for a full-scale attack on Ruijin, the CCP's base of operations, but was temporarily halted by the Manchurian Incident. Mao Zedong seized the opportunity, and set about establishing the provisional government of the Chinese Soviet Republic, in Ruijin.

The fifth anti-communist campaign commenced in October 1933, after the conclusion of the Tanggu Truce, when the situation in North China seemed to have stabilized. During that campaign, three important policies were adopted: (1) the construction of pillboxes in occupied areas, to ensure that the enemy was surrounded; (2) an economic blockade, designed to block the importation of military supplies and food into the soviets (areas controlled by the communists), and (3) the building of motorways in areas recovered from the communists, to expedite military transport.

The New Life Movement

Chiang Kai-shek's policies during the period between the Manchurian Incident and the outbreak of the 2nd Sino-Japanese War are aptly described by the slogan, "First effect internal pacification, then resist external aggression."[1] What he meant was stabilize China before attacking the enemy without. Specifically, this meant defeat the communists (the Red Army), and then take on Japan.

Chiang believed that once communism has permeated the minds of the people, the damage cannot be undone. If national strength was bolstered, the Chinese could repel any Japanese invasion. The proper way to do things was to first secure peace in China, and then address external problems. His advocacy of dealing with internal problems first demonstrates the untenable position he found himself in, trapped between Japan and the CCP. It can also be construed as a direct expression of his fears that the CCP was capable of polluting the national spirit.

[1] Chiang Kai-shek, *op. cit.*, 46-47.

In keeping with his determination to strengthen national morale, Chiang also advocated and promoted the New Life Movement, a campaign that sought to revive the four cardinal Chinese virtues (propriety, righteousness, integrity, and moral conscience), and apply them to modern times. It was an innovative movement offering spiritual revival to the Chinese people. At its crux was Chiang's conviction that Chinese apathy was brought on by the absence of standards governing daily life, and that personal transformation should outweigh political transformation.

In February 1934 Chiang launched the movement, delivering a speech entitled "Essentials of the New Life Movement" at temporary headquarters in Nanchang. In it he maintained that other nations looked down on China not because it lacked military strength, but because its people were deficient in knowledge and morality. Germany, with its population of only 60 million and no more than 100,000 soldiers, had been compelled by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles to accept harsh conditions. However, under Hitler's leadership Germany had made a comeback; it had been granted arms equality and a reduction in reparations. In contrast, China, with its population of 400 million and two million men in its armed forces, had been forced to endure unequal treaties and the burden of reparations for many years. Chiang's conclusion was that a national rebirth was contingent upon the enhancement of national morality and the acquisition of knowledge. Chiang valued simplicity and cleanliness in daily life, and his objective in establishing the New Life Movement was the complete militarization of the lives of the Chinese people.[2]

He also referred to the Japanese educational system and the Japanese way of living, arguing that both tangible and intangible aspects of Japanese daily life conformed to the four moral values, i.e., propriety, righteousness, integrity, and modesty. He believed that the resulting attitude toward life was the driving force behind the creation of the wealthy and powerful nation Japan had become. Chiang said, "We Chinese are already losing to the Japanese in everyday life, without even having to compete with them amidst the smoke of cannons and the hail of bullets."[3]

Chiang even argued that a powerful military force was not necessary to build a new nation. "What really matters is learning to live like the Japanese do. They have simple habits, such as washing their faces with cold water and eating cold rice throughout the year. Practices like those constitute basic military training. We do not require lofty theories to save our nation. Instead we must begin by correcting two serious vices: spitting and urinating in public. This is the starting point for the revival of the nation and of the people."[4] Some have called Chiang the "Chinese Hitler," but the New Life Movement embodies noteworthy aspects that reveal his basic ideas about nation building.

"Enemy or Friend?"

In December 1934 the *Diplomatic Review,* a journal issued under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and published in Nanjing, carried an essay entitled "Enemy or Friend?" Legal

[2] Chiang Kai-shek, "*Xin shenghuo yundong zhi yaoyi*" (Essentials of the New Life Movement), lecture delivered at Nanchang, February 19, 1934, full text, *Wikisource*, https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hant/新生活運動之要義.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

scholar Xu Daolin was listed as the author, but in actuality Chiang Kai-shek had dictated the contents to Chen Bulei, his head secretary. The essay appeared not only in China, but also in many newspapers and magazines in Japan. It maintains that errors made since the Manchurian Incident — errors affecting the relationship between China and Japan — should be attributed not to one or the other, but to both nations.

Chinese errors included (1) missing opportunities, (2) misjudging Japan, (3) overconfidence in China's strength, (4) errors in assessing other countries, and (5) internal conflicts. To cite one missed opportunity, "Before 1930 we were too quick to hate Japan and therefore lost the chance to enter into negotiations about the commercial lease problem when the Sino-Japanese Treaty of 1915 was concluded. Since political parties were powerful than the military in Japan at that time, there were ample opportunities to improve relations between China and Japan, and possibly to avoid the Manchurian Incident. But when the Manchurian Incident did erupt, Hu Shi insisted that negotiations on the five demands made by Japan [5] begin immediately. However, Chinese authorities hesitated and refused to negotiate until Japanese troops were withdrawn to the South Manchuria Railway zone. Their stubbornness exacerbated the problem by preventing Japanese moderates from gaining power and, instead, boosting the morale of the military." [6] China's obdurate insistence on Japanese troops' withdrawing to the railway zone clearly complicated the resolution of the incident. Moreover, mention is also made of Chinese responsibility for the Japanese advance into North China: "In the wake of the incident, the Chinese could have attempted to turn the tables on the Japanese before the latter crossed the Great Wall. But they were seduced by the schemes of CCP elements and made a series of errors that resulted in a very difficult situation."[7]

Chiang's verdict: "We must forge a lasting plan for our nation and its people by suppressing our emotions and forming an alliance with Japan. Unless the Chinese people discard the perspective created by hatred of Japan, the obstacles separating our two nations shall never be overcome, and we shall both be ruined."[8]

An enumeration of Japanese errors follows: (1) misunderstanding conditions in China, (2) misunderstanding the GMD, (3) misunderstanding the Chinese mentality, (4) diplomatic blunders, and (5) mistakes of their own creation.

About "misunderstanding the GMD," the author argues that "Japan's observation that the GMD is the source of anti-Japanese sentiment, and that the problems between China and Japan cannot be resolved until it is defeated, is a colossal error. Since the GMD clearly abandoned its pro-

[5] See Chapter 10.3.

[6] Chen Bulei (writing under the pseudonym Xu Daolin), "Di hu? You hu? Zhongri guanxi de jiantao" (*Enemy or Friend? A Study of Sino-Japanese Relations*) in *Wajiao pinglun* （*Diplomatic Review*） (December 1934): Facsimile at Wikimedia Commons, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/33/NLC416-17jh007138-103043_%E6%95%B5%E4%B9%8E%EF%BC%9F%E5%8F%8B%E4%B9%8E%EF%BC%9F.pdf.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

communist policy after 1927 (referring to the failure of the 1st United Front), Japan should not have had any misgivings about entering into an alliance with the GMD."[9] Well yes, the GMD abandoned its pro-communist policy, but in name only. By that time the GMD had been communized from top to bottom; Chiang's argument was overly simplistic.

The conclusion of this essay was that the conflict between China and Japan would be resolved if Japan simply returned Manchuria; thenceforth, China's and Japan's hearts would beat as one. The time was now right for the farsighted and wise politicians of both nations to demonstrate great courage and save both countries from the tragic fate of joint collapse. This argument, which foolishly implies that Manchuria could be returned immediately, tells us that Chiang's perception of Japan was not sufficiently discerning. Nevertheless, "Enemy or Friend?" is a very noteworthy effort, as it expresses Chiang's sincere opinions about improving Sino-Japanese relations.[10]

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*

2. COMINTERN MACHINATIONS

CCP eager for war with Japan

Nearly one million Nationalist government troops surrounded the communists' base in Jiangxi province in their fifth sweep of CCP forces, which began in 1933. In October 1934 the communists resigned themselves to abandoning Ruijin, and the main strength of the 100,000-man Red Army embarked on a westward exodus. They covered 14,000 kilometers until finally finding safety in Yan'an, Shanxi province. Their journey is referred to as the Long March.

As CCP troops fled westward, there was a huge amount of attrition. When they fled into North China, they soon encountered Japanese soldiers, thus setting the stage for the Lugou Bridge Incident. The fact that the Nationalist forces failed to capture the communists at Ruijin would return to haunt them.

A political artifice that aided the fleeing CCP forces was the Comintern's Popular Front strategy. The Comintern's Seventh World Congress was held in Moscow from July 25 to August 20, 1935. At the congress Japan, Germany, and Italy were identified as the most dangerous instigators of war. As a policy intended to protect the Soviet regime from those instigators, the communist parties of all member nations were ordered to form an extensive, united, anti-fascist Popular Front.

Unsurprisingly, the Soviet Union did not appreciate the improvement in Japan-China relations in 1935. As a step toward the communization of Asia, its most fervent hope was a war between Japan and China's Nationalist government, one that would exhaust both combatants.

The thaw in the relationship between Japan and China allowed the GMD to focus on eliminating the communists, and even better, gave the Japanese military the freedom to prepare a defense against the USSR. These eventualities irritated the Soviet Union no end. Therefore, the formation of extensive anti-fascist Popular Fronts by the Seventh Comintern World Congress as its immediate strategy was certainly welcome news to the Chinese communists, then on the Long March after having been ousted from Ruijin.

Here is historian A.B. Ulam's opinion of the situation:

> To put it bluntly, the renewal of hostilities between China and Japan was clearly in the Soviet interest. At the Comintern Congress, while the speeches of all other Communist representatives breathed a genuine desire for peace … the Chinese delegate asserted "the earnest desire of the Chinese people to take up arms against the Japanese oppressors." … It would be absurd to believe that this desire of the Chinese Communists to renew fighting between China and Japan, much as it was probably an expression of their nationalism and self-interest, did not correspond exactly to Soviet wishes.[1]

[1] A. B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-73* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 233-34.

"Trojan horse" strategy

It is widely known that the Popular Front strategy bore fruit in the form of Popular Front governments established in Spain and France in 1936. In China, on August 1, 1933, the Chinese Soviet government's People's Committee and the CCP's Central Committee issued the August 1 Declaration, which bore the official title "A Message to All Our Compatriots To Oppose the Japanese and To Save Our Country."

The declaration castigated Chiang Kai-shek, Wang Jingwei, Zhang Xueliang, and Zhang Qun, referring to them as traitors and pawns of the Japanese invaders. It also harshly condemned slogans like "First internal pacification, then resistance to external forces," "Japan-China friendship," and "Pan-Asianism," labeling them shameless and deceitful. It urged all political parties and organizations, and military units to put past conflicts behind them:

> We must first of all suspend all the internal strifes [sic], rise above all sorts of differences, and concentrate our entire national strength … upon our fight for the achievement of our holy mission to save our country through opposing the Japanese. The Soviet Government and the Communist Party in China once more declare as follows: The Nationalists must at once stop attacking the Soviet area and all their troops must make preparations for a war against Japan.[2]

While the declaration attacked Chiang and other Nationalist government leaders, the "Overthrow the Nationalist Government" slogan was absent from its pages. This was, essentially, a sudden tactical shift from the traditional "united front from below," intended to exploit the lower classes, to a "united front from above" aimed at bringing about the collapse of the upper classes.

In effect, the CCP ostensibly abandoned its previous worker-centered class struggle, instead adopting a new tactic to attract *all* classes — intellectuals, the petty bourgeoisie, workers, peasants, and students — and stretching its red tentacles deep into the enemy's camp.

At the Comintern's Seventh World Congress, held in Moscow, CCP representative Chen Shaoyu (aka Wang Ming) offered reasons for adopting the August 1 Declaration: (1) the Red Army alone cannot defeat Japan, and (2) the obstacles preventing the CCP's becoming the leader of all the people must be removed. This can be interpreted as an admission on the part of the CCP that the enfeebling of the party's military strength and leadership at that time was the motivation for the issuance of the August 1 Declaration. Georgi Dimitrov, general secretary of the Comintern, aptly described the Popular Front as the "Trojan horse" strategy.[3] This anti-Japanese united-front

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[2] "A Message to All Our Compatriots to Oppose the Japanese and to Save Our Country, Issued by the Chinese Communists, August 1, 1935." Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, Far Eastern and Pacific Branch, ca. 1945–46. Declassified OSS document. National Diet Library Digital Collections (Japan), ID 11922110. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fc/NDL11922110_Def._Doc._No._980D-_A_message_to_all_our_compartments_to_oppose_the_Japanese_and_to_save_our_country_issued_by_the_Chinese_Communists_1_Aug._1935.pdf.

[3] "The United Front and the Fascist Mass Organizations," speech delivered by Georgi Dimitrov at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern on 02 August 1935. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm.

proposition was a very timely recovery strategy adopted by the CCP, now on the verge of collapse after Chiang's punishing campaigns, which were designed to annihilate it.

Communist troops infiltrate Shanxi province

It was early November by the time Mao Zedong's Red Army arrived in Yan'an. The Long March, a westward journey that had lasted for more than a year and covered more than 10,000 kilometers, was finally over. Only 6,000 of the 100,000 who had begun the journey remained. On November 1, the Nationalist government established its Northwest Bandit Suppression Headquarters in Xi'an, the capital of Shanxi province. It was there Zhang Xueliang, deputy commander in chief, began the final sweep of the communists, and that the Xi'an Incident would take place. At the beginning of 1936 Red Army forces in northern Shanxi province numbered approximately 30,000 men, including about 20,000 led by Peng Dehuai, Lin Biao, and Liu Zhidan.

Zhang Xueliang's Northeastern Army had been charged with eradicating the communist forces, but had no interest in fighting them. In February 1936, the 20,000-plus communist army advanced eastward into Shanxi province without engaging in combat with the Northeastern Army. Shanxi province had been under the control of Yan Xishan since 1911, and with the exploitation of its abundant coal and iron ore resources, industrialization had proceeded steadily; it was now ideal prey for the hungry communists. The 50,000-man Shanxi forces lost battle after battle against the communist army of 20,000; after one month of fighting, one-third of the province had fallen into the hands of the communists. These events worsened tension in North China and created a need for reinforcements of Japan's China Garrison Army.

Responding to communist infiltration into Shanxi, Chiang deployed a large part of his Central Army to Shanxi, and commenced a massive assault on communist forces in early March. Realizing that they were at a disadvantage, the communists began withdrawing from Shanxi in late March; their evacuation was completed in early May. Within the same time frame, on May 5, faced with ruin and annihilation, the CCP issued a telegram appealing for a cease-fire, peace talks, and joint resistance against Japan. The appeal called for an end to civil warfare, i.e., cessation of campaigns against the communists and unity in the fight against Japan. This plea for a united anti-Japanese front had an immense impact on the Northeastern Army, and eventually led to the Xi'an Incident.

Why the China Garrison Army required reinforcements

As already stated, the communists' ingress into Shanxi became a major concern for the Japanese military. In mid-March, Japanese Army authorities instructed the Shanxi provincial authorities, in cooperation with the Hebei-Chahar government, to conduct a sweep of the communists, instructing them to ask for Japanese military assistance, if necessary. Such assistance would be contingent upon the augmentation of the China Garrison Army. There was another reason why reinforcements were needed: the painful awareness on the part of the Japanese that there were not sufficient troops to protect the growing Japanese civilian population.

However, there was another motivation for the augmentation, which remained unrevealed. By promoting the commander of the China Garrison Army to the same rank as his counterpart in the

Guandong Army by imperial order, the China Garrison Army hoped to forestall future interference in North China affairs from the Guandong Army. Accordingly, in May 1936, the China Garrison Army (commonly known as the Tianjin Army) had its commander, Tashiro Kan'ichirō, elevated by imperial appointment to the same level as the commander of the Guandong Army. Additionally, the size of the China Garrison Army was increased from 2,000 to 5,000 men.

Furthermore, in connection with the deployment of the reinforced Tianjin Army, there was one instance in which well-intentioned policies resulted in tragedy. With a view to dominating North China, the General Staff had planned to station part of the augmented Tianjin Army in Tongzhou, thereby establishing defense readiness for East Hebei. However, Army Vice-Minister Umezu Yoshijirō was strongly opposed to this plan. His argument was that in accordance with the spirit of the Boxer Protocol, which sanctioned the stationing of foreign troops in North China, it was unacceptable to station a garrison in Tongzhou, far from the Beijing-Tianjin Railway. Ultimately "political opinion overpowered military opinion," to quote Ishiwara Kanji. The decision was made to station part of the garrison (one battalion) in Fengtai, four kilometers southwest of Beiping, instead of in Tongzhou. Vice-Minister Umezu objected to the posting of troops in Tongzhou out of respect for an international treaty. But we must be mindful that (1) it was the units stationed in Fengtai that were caught up in the Lugou Bridge incident in the following year, and that (2) the Tongzhou Incident, in which many Japanese residents were massacred, was contrived to take advantage of the absence of Japanese troops there. I make mention of this irony because it is an illustrative case — one that demonstrates the irony and brutality of history — in which good intentions had terrible repercussions.

Communist plot masquerading as national salvation

The August 1 Declaration sparked the emergence of a rash of anti-Japanese organizations. Momentum toward the formation of an anti-Japanese national united front grew with each passing day. December 1935 saw the establishment of the Shanghai Women's Association for National Salvation, at the heels of which other anti-Japanese organizations with "national salvation association" in their names cropped up in many regions and sectors of society.

Chiang Kai-shek's reaction was to issue a warning to the effect that there was still hope of recovering lost power through diplomacy, and that the "national salvation" slogans were tools being used by the CCP to regain power. But the anti-Japanese movement had reached such a fever pitch that it was beyond the control of the Nationalist government. In February 1936, heartened by increasing anti-Japanese sentiment, the CCP issued a telegram carrying the title "Convocation of a National Congress for Resisting Japan and Saving Our Nation." It strongly advocated recognition of the CCP's freedom of action, resistance to Japan instead of civil war, and an immediate declaration of war against Japan. Suddenly, pro-Japanese sentiment all but disappeared, and the focus of debates was now when war against Japan should begin.

On May 31, 1936 representatives of more than 60 National Salvation associations and 18 cities met in Shanghai, where they established the United Association for National Salvation Encompassing All Sectors of Society. It was there that all anti-Japanese forces coalesced. Resisting the Japanese and saving the nation was essentially a communist movement — the Chinese version

of the Popular Front concept. It was a clever façade, a maneuver that temporarily abandoned the class struggle so as to encourage cooperation between pro-communist elements and the GMD.

Persistent acts of anti-Japanese terrorism

As hostility toward the Japanese increased, a wave of indiscriminate acts of terrorism struck. Brief descriptions of some of these anti-Japanese incidents perpetrated at the close of 1935 and during 1936 follow; not a few of them were outright massacres.

Date	Incident	Description
11/09/1935	Murder of Seaman Nakayama	Chinese terrorists ambush and shoot Seaman 1st Class Nakayama, member of Shanghai Naval Landing Force, who dies from his injuries
11/11/1935	Hibino Trading Co. Incident	Gang of 10 or more Chinese attacks Japanese ceramics business on Nanjing Road in Shanghai, throwing rocks, paint cans, etc., shattering display window and causing significant damage to premises; offenders litter crime scene with anti-Japanese leaflets
01/21/1936	Swatow Incident	Chinese terrorists ambush and shoot Tsunoda Susumu, a member of the Japanese consular police force in Swatow (Shantou), who dies from his injuries
07/10/1936	Kayō Incident	Chinese terrorists ambush and shoot businessman Kayō Kōsaku while he walks near his home with his three children; he dies from his injuries
08/20/1936	Changsha Incident	Chinese agitators bomb the Shōnan Inn in Changsha, injuring one Japanese national
08/24/1936	Chengdu Incident	Chinese mob viciously beats Watanabe Kōsaburō and three other members of the Japanese press in Chengdu; Watanabe dies from his injuries and two of his colleagues are seriously injured
09/03/1936	Beihai Incident	Chinese mob invades pharmacy and murders proprietor Nakano Junzō, in Beihai, Guandong province
09/19/1936	Hankou Incident	Chinese thugs ambush and assault consular police officer Yoshioka Teijirō, killing him instantly
09/23/1936	Shanghai Incident (Taminato Incident)	Chinese terrorists hiding in a bus ambush and shoot Seaman 2nd Class Taminato Tomomitsu, one of four Japanese sailors enjoying an evening stroll, killing Taminato and seriously wounding two other seamen

11/11/1936	Takase Incident (second fatal shooting of Japanese national in Shanghai)	Chinese assailant shoots Takase Yasuji, a sailor from the *Kasagi* Maru, as he explores the city at night, killing him instantly

The Chengdu Incident was a particularly horrific crime, the culmination of a series of anti-Japanese terrorist attacks. It intensified negative public opinion in Japan and prompted the military to adopt an uncompromising stance, which it communicated to the Japanese Foreign Ministry. However, given the precarious state of the Japan-China relationship at the time, the Foreign Ministry wished to avoid exacerbating relations between the two countries by presenting harsh demands. Instead, it decided to use this opportunity to promote an overall adjustment of Japan-China diplomatic relations. Army and Navy authorities accepted that decision.

In September 1936 negotiations intended to arrive at a resolution of the Chengdu Incident were held between Ambassador to China Kawagoe Shigeru and Foreign Minister Zhang Qun. Zhang said that to dispel anti-Japanese sentiment, Japan would need to respect Chinese sovereignty and administrative unity, and mentioned that the CCP was attempting to provoke an international war, and Japan should take care not to succumb to its machinations. He then expressed his hopes in connection with the adjustment of diplomatic relations between the two nations in the form of five items: (1) abrogation of the Tanggu and Shanghai ceasefire agreements, (2) dissolution of the East Hebei government, (3) a ban on Japanese flights over North China, (4) an end to smuggling, and (5) dissolution of the spurious Mongolian armies in East Chahar and northern Suiyuan. (The Chinese had made these very same demands in negotiations over the three principles held the previous year). Japanese negotiators were infuriated by those demands, and the negotiations reached a dead end. The Japanese were particularly enraged by Chiang Kai-shek's absence from Nanjing (he was on an extended sojourn in Lushan), which they interpreted as unwillingness to meet with them. They decided to issue an ultimatum, insisting that Chiang return to Nanjing. Chiang finally returned to Nanjing in early October. He met with Ambassador Kawagoe, but did little more than express his wish for the Japanese to continue negotiating diplomatic matters with Zhang.

However, November saw the outbreak of the Suiyuan Incident, in which Inner Mongolian and Chinese troops collided. The Chinese announced that the negotiations would not continue, meaning that all efforts made thus far had come to naught. They had gotten the idea into their heads that the defeated Mongolian forces were Guandong Army troops wearing uniforms with Mongolian insignias, and proceeded to broadcast their suspicions. They were mistaken. Only four Japanese soldiers participated in the battle, and the Mongolian forces were … Mongolians. Still, the misunderstanding that the Chinese had actually defeated the Japanese resulted in misguidedly amplified confidence in their Chinese military prowess and hatred for Japan. The result was empty, uncompromising rhetoric vilifying Japan, which escalated into the Lugou Bridge Incident.

3. THE XI'AN INCIDENT

The CCP's revival from "the last five minutes"

It is very likely that the most successful application of the Popular Front strategy was the Xi'an Incident of December 1936, which neither the USSR nor the CCP had anticipated. The incident has yet to be fully elucidated, but it has considerable historical importance because it (1) crystallized the growing momentum toward cooperation between the GMD and the CCP, and (2) brought to fruition the CCP's scheme to revive itself through a confrontation between China and Japan, thus paving the way for the Lugou Bridge Incident.

As mentioned above, by the time they completed their westward migration in 1936, the CCP forces were an extremely feeble army indeed. Therefore, from their viewpoint, the key to survival was putting a stop to the Nationalist government's anti-communist sweeps and directing that energy toward the Japanese forces, thus causing a war between Japan and China. With its military strength decimated, the Communist army was close to obliteration. According to Chiang Kai-shek's diary, the Nationalists' "campaign had been prosecuted to such a stage that it would require only the efforts of 'the last five minutes' to achieve the final success."[1]

The CCP's last-ditch plan was to adopt a communization operation that involved indoctrinating lower-ranking Nationalist soldiers. The Northeast Army troops under Zhang Xueliang (deputy commander in chief of the Northwest Bandit Suppression Headquarters) had been participating in communist sweeps in Shaanxi province. Since the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident, they had been unable to return to Manchuria, their homeland. Instead, they were compelled to remain in the North China heartland. Therefore, homesickness and anti-Japanese sentiment were extremely intense among them. The CCP toyed with their emotions with slogans like "Chinese do not shoot Chinese," "United against Japan," and "Let us fight our way back to Manchuria."
These rallying cries gradually ensconced themselves in the minds of the Northeast Army troops.

Zhang Xueliang began to waver as his subordinates and others in his milieu leaned politically to the left. Propaganda had shown its power, as Chiang Kai-shek keenly observed.

> [The Communists] especially singled out Chang Hsueh-liang's [Zhang Xueliang's] troops for intensive psychological warfare and tried to provoke Chang into rebellion. Torn between "suppression of the Communists" and "resistance against Japan," Chang lost his head and succumbed.[2]

Xueliang had also learned, from personal experience, that yesterday's enemy could become today's friend. For instance, both Yu Xuezhong and Song Zheyuan had once been his enemies, but were now loyal subordinates and close friends. Furthermore, Zhang himself had once been opposed to the Nationalist revolution, but ended up doing an about-face when he became a willing

[1] Chiang Kai-shek, *The Account of the Fortnight in Sian When the Fate of China Hung in the Balance* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc.), 119; https://archive.org/details/generalchiangkai00chia/page/n3/mode/2up.

[2] Chiang Kai-shek, *Soviet Russia in China*, 83.

participant in the Northeastern Flag Replacement. He was convinced that since he was Chinese, and the members of the CCP were all Chinese, he and they might become good friends in the future.[3] It was this sort of blind faith in the CCP that, at least in part, led him down the wrong path.

Unsettled by communist psychological warfare, Zhang made overtures to the CCP. He met secretly with chief political strategist and negotiator Zhou Enlai in Yan'an in the summer of 1936. The two men arrived at an agreement on 10 conditions for joint resistance to Japan, which they promised to make every effort to satisfy. They included the following:

(1) The Red Army shall be incorporated into the Nationalist Army.
(2) The CCP shall refrain from attacks on Nationalist troops.
(3) The Nationalist government shall release imprisoned CCP members and grant them freedom of movement.
(4) After victory in the anti-Japanese war, the Nationalist government shall recognize the CCP as a legitimate political party.[4]

After that meeting Zhang kept in touch with the CCP, providing it with material support and otherwise deepening his relationship with the party. As time passed, his appetite for suppressing the communists diminished.

Chiang Kai-shek abducted and confined

In late October of 1936 Chiang Kai-shek, (president of the Executive Yuan, chairman of the National Military Council, and commander in chief of the Northwest Bandit Suppression Forces) flew to Xi'an to supervise and invigorate Zhang Xueliang's communist-suppression campaign. However, by that time the Northeast Army's anti-communist activities had effectively ceased.

The incident occurred in the early morning of December 12. A group headed by a Northeast Army officer arrested and imprisoned Chiang Kai-shek, who was staying at Huaqing Hot Springs, a resort east of Xi'an. Some of the high-ranking Nationalist government officials accompanying Chiang were also arrested and imprisoned; others were shot to death. In Xi'an proper, Yang Hucheng's troops attacked and disarmed military and civilian police officers.

That evening Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng sent a telegram containing eight proposals to destinations all over China. The demands were:

(1) Reorganize the Nanking government so that members of other parties and cliques might come in and help save the nation.
(2) Stop all civil wars.

[3] Zhang Xueliang, "*Xi'an shibian canhui lu,*" *Confession of the Xi'an Incident*), *Ming-pao yüeh-k'an* (明報月刊), no. 33 (September 1968), 50, **as cited in** Tien-wei Wu, *The Sian Incident* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1976), 52.

[4] Furuya Keiji, *Chiang Kai-shek, His Life and Times*, 510.

(3) Release immediately the patriotic leaders[5] who had been arrested in Shanghai.
(4) Pardon all political offenders.
(5) Guarantee the people's liberty of assembly.
(6) Give a free hand to the people to carry out patriotic movements.
(7) Carry out the leader's[6] will faithfully.
(8) Call a National Salvation Conference immediately.[7]

Since the proposals were similar in nature to demands the CCP had been making, their impact both at home and abroad was staggering.

When CCP members got word of the incident, many of them called for a people's court at which Chiang Kai-shek would be tried. Mao Zedong was committed to killing Chiang and resisting the Japanese. He looked to Moscow for instructions from Stalin. Stalin responded by telling Mao to join with Chiang in resisting the Japanese (meaning that he was to release Chiang). Upon reading the telegram from Stalin, Mao reportedly flew into a rage, swore and stamped his feet.[8] Stalin was probably worried that the GMD forces would annihilate the Chinese Communist Army if Chiang was not released, and that the anti-communist, pro-Japanese Wang Jingwei might, in Chiang's stead, take up the reins of government.

Zhang seeks support from the CCP

The Xi'an Incident sparked strong public criticism against Zhang Xueliang within China, which in turn prompted the Nationalist government to punish him. Chiang Kai-shek's stance toward Xueliang was harsher than expected. Chiang had refused to acquiesce to any of Xueliang's demands. That stance triggered a growing outcry from young officers who demanded that Chiang be executed, putting Xueliang in a difficult position. Eventually, Xueliang requested support from the CCP and dissolved the Northwest Bandit Suppression Headquarters. To comply with CCP demands, he formed the Provisional Northwest Military Council of the Anti-Japanese United Forces. Subsequently Zhou Enlai, Ye Jianying and one other CCP official arrived in Xi'an, where they reportedly agreed to adhere strictly to the eight proposals, and to arrive at an expeditious, peaceful resolution.

Finally, on December 22, Soong Mei-ling (Chiang's wife), Soong Tse-ven (Mei-ling's brother), and Australian William Henry Donald (personal advisor to the Chiang family) arrived in Xi'an, as if entering a tiger's lair.[9] Mei-ling lectured Zhang Xueliang on the error of his ways and asked him to release her husband. Zhang's reply was that Yang Hucheng was opposed to setting him free.

[5] Anti-Japanese movement leaders.

[6] Sun Yat-sen's wishes.

[7] Chiang Kai-shek, *The Account of the Fortnight in* Sian, 149.

[8] Edgar Snow, *Random Notes on Red China (1936-946)* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1957), 2.

[9] Chiang Kai-shek, *The Account of the Fortnight in* Sian, 93.

According to Mei-ling's recollection of the incident, she met with an "important person"[10] on December 23.

According to generally accepted belief, the "important person" was Zhou Enlai. Zhou reportedly stated that the CCP had no connection whatsoever with the incident, and that only Chairman Chiang Kai-shek was capable of leading the entire nation. He believed that Chiang was sincere about saving China, and only resented his slowness in acting. During the interview, Zhou supposedly promised Meiling that he would urge Yang Hucheng to release her husband.

On December 25, the deadline for the end of the ceasefire between the Nationalists and communists, Zhang made the decision to release Chiang Kai-shek, to which Yang agreed. Chiang departed from Xi'an by plane that evening and arrived in Nanjing on the following day, at which point the incident finally came to a close.

Xueliang requested and received permission to accompany Chiang to Nanjing to take responsibility for the incident, and to demonstrate that his actions were not motivated by ambition and that he bore no malice toward Chiang. At a court-martial supervised by the Military Council, Xueliang was sentenced to a 10-year prison term and deprived of his civil rights for five years. On January 4, 1937 Chiang Kai-shek had him pardoned, but he remained under the supervision of the Military Council. When the Nationalist government moved to Taiwan, after World War II had ended, Zhang was moved there as well. He was alive and well as of September 1989.[11]

Conditions for Chiang's release: still an unsolved mystery

Was Chiang able to return safely to Nanjing on the strength of promises he made to Xueliang and his cohorts? This crucial point remains unclear to this day.

The CCP argues that Chiang promised to end civil warfare and join it in resisting Japan. But the Nationalist government insisted that Chiang's release was unconditional. Chiang's personal account of the incident states only that Chiang harshly rejected Xueliang's demands from beginning to end.[12] The "reprimand" Chiang gave to Zhang and Yang upon Chiang's departure from Xi'an, which was made public upon Chiang's return to Nanjing, reads in part, as follows:

> Since today you have shown due regard for the welfare of the nation and have decided to send me back to Nanking and no longer try to make any special demands or force me to make any promise or give any orders, etc., etc. [13]

Here, again, Chiang emphasizes the fact that his release was unconditional.

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[10] Furuya, *op. cit.*, 519.

[11] Translator's note: Zhang Xueliang died in Honolulu in 2001.

[12] Chiang Kai-shek, *The Account of the Fortnight*, *passim.*

[13] Chiang Kai-shek, *The Account of the Fortnight in* Sian, 177.

Both Chiang and Zhou are no longer of this world. Journalist Miao Jianqiu, who had many Japanese acquaintances, and is rumored to have been one of the masterminds of the incident, has passed on. The only person who can tell us what really transpired in Xi'an is Zhang Xueliang who is living out his golden years in Taiwan. However, there is no chance that Xueliang, still under house arrest, would make a statement that would stain Chiang's honor and the government's history. The truth is not likely to ever see the light of day.

What should we assume? My theory is that in Xi'an, out of respect for Chiang, the CCP did not insist upon his signature in exchange for his release. In fact, the CCP has attested to this. But the Communists must have secured some verbal concessions from Chiang. In other words, even if Chiang did not make any specific promises verbally or in writing, he must have uttered words that raised significant expectations among CCP leaders, Xueliang, and others.

The speed with which cooperation between the Nationalists and the CCP progressed after the incident seems to support, in one respect, the correctness of my reasoning.

Skepticism about a second United Front

The Xi'an Incident resulted in China's changing course. Besides precipitating an end to civil war and united resistance against Japan, it served as an opportunity to facilitate a second cooperation between the Nationalists and Communists.

Still, there were GMD members who both questioned and criticized this move toward cooperation, just as there had been with the first GMD-CCP united front. For instance, while the incident was still in progress, philosopher and public essayist Hu Shih published an essay arguing that the Communist Party, with its internationalist focus, could never be patriotic. He added that the CCP's proclaimed anti-Japanese stance was a shameless deception, and appealed to readers to be cautious of the CCP.[14]

Furthermore, pro-Japanese and anti-communist groups advocated achieving unification while avoiding conflict with Japan. Awaiting Wang Jingwei's return to Japan, they strongly opposed the anti-Japanese groundswell.

In March 1936, after being shot in an assassination attempt in November 1935, Wang embarked on a trip abroad to receive medical care and recuperate. However, at the request of the Nanjing government, Wang returned to China in January 1937 in the wake of the Xi'an Incident.

Wang pointed out the differences between the popular front in France, which was not backed by a Soviet state, and the popular front trumpeted by the CCP. He emphasized the danger in trusting the Communist Party, which blatantly broke promises and discarded loyalties in the name of revolution. He warned that the bitter experiences of the past deserve our attention. Wang expressed serious doubts about the Communist Party and about GMD-CCP cooperation, arguing that domestic stability should precede resistance to external forces.

[14] Hu Shih, "The Treason of Chang Hsüeh-liang," as cited in Wu Tien-wei, *The Sian Incident: A Pivotal Point in Modern Chinese History* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1976), 122.

CCP is resuscitated; tensions heighten in North China

Still, in January of 1937 civil warfare, the anti-communist campaigns, came to a halt, and the CCP was resuscitated with only "the five minutes" to spare. On January 6 the Northwest Bandit Headquarters in Xi'an was closed, effectively putting an end to the 10-year-long strife between the GMD and the CCP.

Zhang Qun, the pro-Japanese foreign minister, was relieved of his position, and replaced by the anti-Japanese, pro-Western Wang Chonghui. The result was that the resist-and-negotiate diplomatic policy associated with Zhang Qun underwent a major shift towards a pro-Western stance.

As already stated, the anti-Japanese camp was not solidly unified. Still, preparations were underway for war against Japan, aided by a temporary upturn in economic conditions. In 1937 the Nationalist government's military disbursements climbed to 70% of the national budget. These mammoth expenditures enabled the formation of an army of 700,000 men, and the launching of military training programs for more than a million Chinese civilians. Manipulated by the scheming of the Soviet Union and the CCP, China abruptly embarked on a headlong charge down the path to militarism and war.

The situation in North China grew tense. Four hundred thousand troops (100,000 from Song Zheyuan's 29th Army and 110,000 from the Northeast Army) surrounded the 5,000 Japanese soldiers of the China Garrison Army. Additionally, 350,000 Central Army troops were positioned in the Xuzhou-Longhai Railway corridor, awaiting an opportunity to advance northward. During the period immediately preceding the Lugou Bridge Incident, resentment of Japan on the part of the National Salvation Federation and other anti-Japanese organizations was growing daily. The Xi'an Incident — a major driving force that transformed the Chinese civil war into a war against Japan — was an event of crucial significance in the modern history of East Asia.